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[RE]FRAMING VIOLENCE:

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA BY

KJEL WAYNE JOHNSON

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

JOHN MOWITT, ADVISER

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HOLLYWOOD CINEMA & LATE CAPITALISM 1967-2001

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JMowitt

John Mowitt

26 November 2006

GRADUATE SCHOOL

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For Martin C. Wiltgen,
1935-1995
In memoriam

and

For Emily,
for everything.
I love you.

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INTRODUCTION
SITUATING THE VIOLENT IMAGINARY

The classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less here is essayed.[1]

"Ishmael"
Moby-Dick

Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes. Chaos does not exist; it is an abstraction because it is inseparable from a screen that makes something – something rather than nothing – emerge from it. (…) If chaos does not exist, it is because it is merely the bottom side of the great screen, and because the latter composes infinite series of wholes and parts, which appear chaotic to us (as aleatory developments) only because we are incapable of following them, or because of the insufficiency of our own screens.[2]

Gilles Deleuze
The Fold

THE CONTOURS OF THE PROJECT

On the broadest scale, this project seeks to accomplish three things: first, to reevaluate the prevailing public and academic discourses surrounding the three, often separately-considered titular terms by arguing for their interdependence and inseparability; second, to situate the ways in which this tripartite constellation creates and fosters what I will be calling "the violent imaginary" – that more or less univocally specific, commonly and intuitively held, but nonetheless extremely limited image of violence that has determined the contours of public, political, and even academic debates – while at the same time presenting opportunities for the latter's interrogation; and third, to argue that this cinema's persistence in our current international multimedia landscape is in large part due to its indispensability in politically, materially, and culturally reframing violence.

More directly, this project is an attempt to reframe how our active and acted-upon knowledge of violence is determined by commercial cinema under late capitalism, and how this knowledge it is actualized and extended in the fundamentally inseparable spheres of thinking (the epistemological), acting (the political), and being (the experiential) that, in their immanent relations of interaffectivity and affectability, comprise what Gilles Deleuze calls a "mode of existence." The first section, "Concepts and Constitutions," explores in Chapter

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[1] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 145.
[2] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 76-77.

One ("That Terrible 'Concept'") how recent cultural, theoretical, and philosophical trends have framed violence as a concept in ways both concordant and discordant with that "imaginary" and its historio-cultural foundations, and then in Chapter Two ("A Violent Machine?") proceeds to situate the cinematic apparatus as not only a central and vital mechanism in those processes, but also as an intrinsically violent machine that accommodates us to and implicates us in the violence *of* the violent imaginary. The second section, "Functions and Formations," extends and examines the implications of the first, with each chapter emphasizing to varying degrees the three spheres mentioned above. Chapter Three ("Defining and Refining the Act") emphasizes the political, attending questions of how "traditional" conceptualizations of violence are problematized by the terms of contemporary bourgeois class consciousness. Chapter Four ("Ludovico in Action") emphasizes the experiential, exploring how affective considerations may help us distinguish between "images of violence" and "violent images." Finally, Chapter Five ("Millennialism and Melancholia, or, Apocalypse NOW!/?") returns us to the terrain of the epistemological, tracing how the pervasive tropes of melancholia, apocalypse, and suicidality in millennial Hollywood films point to specific political resignations and potentialities in the full bloom of what Guy Debord calls "the integrated spectacle."

Given the complexities of these relations – the multiple interaffectivities, consequences, and considerations upon which they open – the path that lies ahead is at times tortuous in its movement through aporias and apocryphalities toward apocalypse. It is not a declarative document, but a *heuristic* one, opening less upon concrete situations than the infinity of the question, the true "problem," of violence. This is, ultimately, a *diagrammatic* text: while there are many points of sojournment for more trenchant inquiry, the purpose of this project is to situate a field and provide a rough cartography of its landmarks, pointing out what this tourist found to be some interesting points of attraction – even the tourist traps – along the way. And like any cartography or travelogue, there is terrain uncharted, territories unclaimed; given the scope and scale of such an endeavor, these elisions and scotomae are as inevitable as they are ethically necessary given the dynamic and contestatory qualities of the "objects" at hand.

For the goal, ultimately, is not to rewrite or reimagine the history of violence, cinema, and late capitalism, and certainly not to definitively or unilaterally account for and resolve all points and consequences of their intersection, but rather to trace and bring into new points of contact what I feel to be some of the more salient, pressing, and urgent theorizations of each, however methodologically dispersed: sometimes affirming them, sometimes problematizing them, in order to reframe, and indeed to recenter, the three titular terms as part of the same immanent domain. In themselves, these terms today are perhaps shopworn beyond repair, old hat and overcharted; but considered together, as each equally integral and essential to the totality of spectacular relations and their all-too-material effects, the stakes are anything but diminished. For in maintaining and promulgating its image(s) of violence, the cinema, as a still-crucial apparatus to the violent imaginary, sustains a mode of production that is as much triumphal as teetering on an imminent and immanent crisis: in the post-Cold War landscape, its power and the violences it simultaneously gives rise to and relies upon are unchecked and without stops, but at the same time, its productive structuring oppositions are diffused and dissolved, ushering new relations to its own power for which it cannot account, from geopolitical terrorism to a growing *ressentiment* of authorless power and apocryphal violence in a world organized by global corporate and capital networks. In the simplest terms, the cinema and the violent imaginary it informs and sustains provide images of and relations to violence that permit the various subjects and subjectivities organized under late capitalism to tarry on and carry forth in the oft-uncertain and oft-explosive spectacular topography proper to our time.

THE TERMS OF DEBATE:
QUANTITY, QUALITY, & THE "PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE"

Cinematic violence can be approached in terms of two closely linked questions: Why is there so much of it? How much of it is justified, and on what grounds?[3]

Philip French
"Violence in the Cinema"

Both against and in response to the interminable, voluminous, and fervid public debates over the value and effects of violence in whatever sphere of representation, the "problem of violence" that will confront us here is as much one of the term's somewhat paradoxical ineffability and indeterminacy as it is of its more immediate empirical presence and material effects. In Keywords, Raymond Williams provides perhaps the most comprehensive definition of violence available by these terms, and it is worth quoting at length:

> **Violence** is now a difficult word, because its primary sense is of physical assault, as in 'robbery with violence', yet it is also used more widely in ways that are not easy to define. If we take physical assault as sense (i) we can take a clear general sense (ii) as the use of physical force, including the distant use of weapons or bombs, but we have then to add that this seems to be specialized to 'unauthorized' uses: the **violence** of a 'terrorist' but not, except by its opponents, of an army, where 'force' is preferred and most operations of war and preparation for war are described as 'defence'; or the similar partisan range between 'putting under restraint' or 'restoring order', and 'police violence'. We can note also a relatively simple sense (iii), which is not always clearly distinguished from (i) and (ii), as in 'violence on television', which can include the reporting of violent physical events but indicates mainly the dramatic portrayal of such events.
>
> The difficulty begins when we try to distinguish sense (iv), **violence** as threat, and sense (v), **violence** as unruly behaviour. Sense (iv) is clear when the threat is of physical violence, but it is often used when the real threat, or the real practice, is unruly behaviour. The phenomenon known as 'student violence' included cases in the senses (i) and (ii), but it clearly also included cases of sense (iv) and sense (v). The emotional power of the word then can be very confusing.
>
> It is a longstanding complexity. **Violence** is from fw *violence*, oF, *violentia*, L – vehemence, impetuosity – ultimately from rw *vīs*, L – force. **Violence** had the sense of physical force in English for lC13, and was used of hitting a priest in 1303. From the same period we hear, in chat seems a familiar tone, that the word is in a state
>
> Of filthe and of corrupcion
> Of violence and oppression.

---

[3] French, "Violence in the Cinema," 60.

> But this use is interesting, because it reminds us that **violence** can be exercised in both ways, as Milton insisted of Charles I: 'a tedious warr on his subjects, wherein he hath so farr exceeded his arbitrary violences in time of peace' (1649). There has been obvious interaction between **violence** and *violation*, the breaking of some custom or some dignity. This is part of the complexity. But **violent** has also been used in the English, as in the Latin, for intensity or vehemence: 'marke me with what violence she first lov'd the Moore' (*Othello*, II, I); 'violence of party spirit' (Coleridge, 1818). There was an interesting note in 1696: 'violence ... figuratively spoken of Human Passions and Designs, when unruly, and not to be govern'd'. It is the interaction of this sense with the sense of physical force that underlies the real difficulties of senses (iv) and (v); a sense (vi), as in 'violently in love', is never in practice misunderstood. But if it is said that the State uses force, not only in senses (i) and (ii) but more critically in the sense (iv) – the threat implied as the consequence of any breach of 'law and order' as at any one time or in any one place defined – it is objected that **violence** is the wrong word for this, not only because of the sense of 'authorized' force but because it is not 'unruly'. At the same time, questions of what it is to be 'unruly' or 'not to be govern'd' can be side-stepped. It is within the assumption of 'unruly', and not, despite the transfer in the word, of physical force, that loud or vehement (or even very strong and persistent) verbal criticism has been commonly described as **violent**, and the two steps beyond that – threat to some existing arrangement, threat of actual force – sometimes become a moving staircase to the strong meanings of **violence** in senses (i) and (ii).
>
> It is then clearly a word that needs early specific definition, if it is not (as in yet another case, (vii)) to be done **violence** to – to be wrenched from its meaning or significance (from 1C16).[4]

It is clear enough that, running afoul of Williams' final admonition, the perennial debates about violence ("real" and "represented") in the public sphere are less and less concerned about what violence *is* than what it *does*, or threatens to do, in times *to come*. In most spheres of consideration, violence is characterized, and hence approached from the start, as a *problem*: a representational problem, a social problem, a legal problem, a state problem, and (though more rarely) a philosophical problem. The "problem of violence" – that is, essentially, the problem that *is* violence, *that violence is* – is framed as a general and even fundamentally irresolvable *fact*, apart from but nonetheless informing and informed by the specific terms of how violence is and is not articulated *as* problematic vis-à-vis particular systems of discourse and power. The means by which this problem is permitted to be articulated as such, and the consequential concept of violence that emerges (an irreducible ontological facticity, an essentially essentializing and transcendentalizing maneuver), lie at the heart of an overarching discursive structure I will shortly be calling *the violent imaginary*. It is through this structure, its operations, and its visible and invisible effects that we can begin to address how (if not yet why) both the "problem of violence" and violence "itself" are defined as such.

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[4] Williams, *Keywords*, 329-331.

While we will explore in more detail both the necessity and the impossibility of defining violence (and, for that matter, of speaking of it at all), the fundamental basis for the drive to define violence in ever-finer terms is as much a product of its status as a political problem as of our pervasive (and qualitatively bourgeois) epistemophilia. This latter, far from politically neutral and carrying within its operational schema fundamental principles of separation and objectification that will be of specific concern presently, is more generally marked by the predominance and persistence of hegemonic notions of instrumental reason and scientific objectivity: in the simplest terms, structures that pose problems that, by definition, demand definition in order to be mastered and solved, and hence position the "problem of violence" as a problem of *knowledge*, hence of *truth*. It is, then (to follow this essentially Foucauldian line), an essentially *political* problem that is and cannot be disclosed as such, and one, per the discursive means of our prevailing ocularcentric regime of truth, resolved and codified in *images* (seeing being not only believing, but the condition of belief as such) and intimately bound to *power*. This problem is compounded by fundamental crises in the fields of knowledge, truth, and politics which are of a piece of the late capitalist (or, more broadly, "postmodern") cultural turn, wherein the image in circulation provides both the means of these destabilizations and also their restabilization: a vicious and self-perpetuating cycle, a structurally maintained state of *permanent but regulated crisis*.

Alongside and in response to this, the bulk of public and political discourse concerning "the problem of violence" – and indeed even much of the critical commentary on such discourse, seeking to unbalance or undo it – is rife with contradiction, categorically descrying violence in fact and in representation while doing to it precisely what the bulk of Hollywood cinema does, and indeed what they accuse it of doing, paying little to no heed to their own complicity in the same processes: transforming it, by a sort of alchemy, into a qualitatively regulated and overdetermined empirical *object*, one that moreover appears phenomenally, arbitrarily, and im-mediately in specific, localizable instances, without symptomatology or causation on a deep-structural or conceptual level, nor with political and affective implications and potentialities on those levels. It is viewed, in other words, as an external and abject problematic rather than an immanent and productive one, and the concerted and determined gestures toward maintaining such a situation are as self-inoculatory as they are self-preservative: quantitative concerns overshadow qualitative interrogations, and limited qualitative concerns serve as the alibi for an expungement of visible violences, the image (and only that) of a world without – and without the need for – violence. In so doing, the objective terms of these discourses and debates maintain a peculiar economy in which violence "in representation" and "in reality" are simultaneously cordoned off as relatively autonomous fields of contest, while at the same time (particularly by the incontestable fact of the sway of representations over reality which found all public debates on "the problem") these fields are clearly positioned as mutually determinate, their boundaries indistinct, fluid. But however reductive and deleterious they might be, the positions and formulations in these debates are indeed useful indices, symptomatic of a dominant discourse concerning "violence" that in the course of objectifying violence at the same time and at every turn works actively to *not* attend its "object" directly, but rather at a conceptual and mediated distance, through an intricately structured and maintained imaginary that provides *certain, fungible forms* that serve as a front for attack but distract and distance from the real epistemological, political, and experiential matters at hand.

To begin to situate the key problematics in the current state of public and political discourse over the intersection of "violence in reality" and "violence in representation," we might first look to a relatively perfunctory piece by Philip French, simply titled "Violence in the Cinema." Included in the 1968 sociological compilation *Violence and the Mass Media* (part of the *Readers in Social Problems* series, dedicated to hot-button bourgeois political problematics of the day including "Juvenile Delinquency" and "Sexual Deviance", among others), this essay is relatively unexceptional for what it isolates as the terms of such debates circa the late 1960s, but for this is also emblematic in that its precepts remain relatively unchanged at the core of more contemporary debates: that violence and our collective appetite for it is a problem of value(s), that this problem is both culturally damaging and particularly pronounced vis-à-vis the centrality of violence to commercial cinema, and that, ultimately, the cinematic treatment or modes of presentation of violence is of greater consequence than its empirical presence within a given film. It is, as French indicates above, a matter of quantity and quality, but with each only superficially rendered and reliant on a more general qualitative assessment that the cinema is at best a mere entertainment, at worst a pervasive and active degenerative force, and in either case something of a natural terrain for violence.

To be fair, French's article is considerably more nuanced than most of its kind, framing the question of the medium's intrinsic and abiding violence as one of an inhering, even operative, aptitude for such subject matter. He notes, though only in passing, that

> (t)here is a sense in which the cinema by its very nature is drawn towards violence. In writing on "Film Aesthetic" many years ago, Sir Herbert Read spoke of the camera as "a chisel of light, cutting into the reality of objects", and it can be maintained that the flickering passage of twenty-four frames per second through the projector, the vertiginous movement of the camera, the continuous shifting of viewpoint, the rapid change of image in both size and character, the very idea of montage, make films – irrespective of their subjects – a violent experience for the audience. Undoubtedly the technique of film is employed in this way. (...) In a far more obvious sense, however, the cinema – as the best description of it, "motion pictures", suggests – tends towards violence. It is concerned with movement, with the telling of stories, the conveying of sensations, the sharing of experiences, the expression of ideas, primarily in terms of the changing relationships of people and objects. (...) The movies are predominately about things happening, and the extreme form of things happening is violence. As everyone knows, the final word before shooting a scene is symbolically the director's call for "Action". Not surprisingly to the movie-maker and the moviegoer the words "action" and "violence" as relating to the content of a film are virtually synonymous.[5]

In this cursory aside, French has already begun to explode the terms of the debate: matter-of-factly positing these limited terms as ancillary to a fundament which, while obvious, is often (and often concertedly) uninterrogated *on its own terms.* Tellingly enough, French too is unwilling to do so: following this statement, he folds his hand and retreats, continuing to appraise the treatments of violence in *These Are the Damned* (Losey, 1962) and *Goldfinger* (Hamilton, 1964) via the basic quantitative and qualitative terms at hand (the number and kind of acts of violence, the degree to which they are justified as coherent, "necessary" narrative developments, and so forth), leaving their conceptual and ideological fundaments relatively uninterrogated and fundamentally undisturbed.

Consequently, in this essay as throughout the entire compendium of which it is a symptomatic piece, violence *itself* is taken as read and as empirical *fact,* never defined apart from its *forms* (i.e., specific acts *of* violence) and paranoiacally postulated *effects* (i.e., the potential negative impact upon the well-oiled, late-capitalist machine, and particularly its problematic sustenance of increasingly problematized bourgeois codes of morality and productivity). Understood as an aberrant and abject assault on the sanctity of the organic unity of the individual and social body, this image of violence reinscribes and reaffirms in every propagative repetition the terms and limits of these and all antecedent and subsequent debates, returning them to their quantitative/objectile and qualitative/ideologized terrain, and in so doing reaffirms the politics of separation, abstraction, and distance that are the keystones both of bourgeois consciousness and of spectacular society's epistemological and experiential violence. And yet French's resigned reiteration of these basic qualitative and quantitative terms is as much evidence of their strength (and that of the grand traditions of modernity from whence they came) as of the strength of the central term with which they tarry: a task for which, as became particularly clear at this moment on the American scene, such conceptual fundaments had become less and less adequate, their maintenance more and more desperate.

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[5] French, "Violence in the Cinema," 68-69.

CONTESTED TERRITORIES & POINTS OF DEPARTURE: PERIODICITY & NOTES ON TERMS

Abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them. Under the leveling domination of abstraction (which makes everything in nature repeatable), and of industry (for which abstraction ordains repetition), the freed ones themselves finally came to form that 'herd' which Hegel has declared to be the result of Enlightenment.[6]

Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer
"The Concept of Enlightenment"

Now suddenly a hitherto baleful universal visibility that seemed to brook no utopian alternative is welcomed and reveled in for its own sake: this is the true moment of image society, in which human subjects henceforth exposed … to bombardments of up to a thousand images a day … begin to live a very different relationship to space and time, to existential experience as well as cultural consumption.[7]

Fredric Jameson
"Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity"

Any expressive form lives only in its own present – the one it itself creates.[8]

Clifford Geertz
The Interpretation of Cultures

Before returning to the problematics that "violence" and its imaginary present, a prefatory (if peremptory) situation of the relations between our titular terms is warranted. To enter this discussion, we might best entertain the question of periodicity, in terms of the "brackets" I have imposed. This imposition, to a large degree, is precisely that and should be taken as such. To my mind, as it is to Jameson's, claims to a strict periodicity vis-à-vis the emergence of this (or any) economic, aesthetic, or epistemological mode as an episteme in the Foucauldian sense, or an "epoch" or "era" in the more general or even pedestrian sense, are ultimately unimportant (as the "search for origins" leads us to neglect even more our focus on the exigencies of the present), and even indecipherable (as capitalism itself, in whatever stage, seeks to obfuscate its very historicity: to telegraph a later point, this is another crucial point of coincidence with the cinema, and the violent imaginary, at hand). But at the same time, violence, bound as it is within posed-to-be-resolved narratives of abjection, sacrifice, self-determination, and crisis, in its own ways *demands* a return to origins, and in such a way as to construct or reconstruct the conditions of those origins: in the same way that scars not only have histories, but are and open up on histories, this maneuver to continually revise, rethink, and revisit violence as a matter of provenance is one we see often enough, and will duly attend in the next chapter as something unavoidable by the very terms the "concept" itself presents.

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[6] Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 13.
[7] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, 110-111.
[8] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 445.

Consequently, this relatively arbitrary bracketing is the product of an implicit demand, both crucial because of the textual and American-historical points of departure and also little more than this: a point of departure, from a significant but not cleanly demarcated moment within late capitalism for Hollywood cinema and the thought of violence. While the "endpoint" (2001, the anticlimactic fulmination of the postmodern millennial moment) is one that will be the sole concern of the final chapter, the "beginning" is a complex and even singular point of crisis at which all three of our titular terms, in themselves and in relation to each other, bear an historically significant measure of indeterminacy. In the simplest terms, 1967 roughly marks a particularly critical moment in the history of Hollywood cinema (as an institution and a mode of production) and in the larger sets of socio-political and -economic relations that are of concern to examinations of both the contemporary face of violence and the more or less full-blown emergence of late capitalism: a moment that ultimately coincides with and signals an observable shift not only in the public's direct and discursive relation to violence, but also in the emergence of new modes of its regulation, a moment wherein violence is not only foregrounded and seemingly omnipresent "in reality" and "in representation" alike, but also where its centrality to the mechanics of each is starkly unocculted (indeed, could no longer be occulted), requiring that violence be truly dealt with "on its own terms," as "fact."

It should be clear that this periodicity corresponds to a moment within the emergence and operations of late capitalism, but does not bracket its origins (or for that matter its end) any distinct way. By "late capitalism," I mean precisely and primarily what Fredric Jameson, following Ernest Mandel, has outlined in his voluminous treatises as the third or global stage of an axiomatic capitalist system, which carries with it and holds as its condition of possibility a specific set of often contradictory and incommensurate intersubjective, aesthetic, and geopolitical relations. For Mandel (as for Jameson, who refers to the following passage in his introduction to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*),

> (t)his new period [1940 to 1965] was characterized, among other things, by the fact that alongside machine-made industrial consumer goods (as from the early 19th century) and machine-made machines (as from the mid-19th century), we now find machine-produced raw materials and foodstuffs. Late capitalism, far from representing a 'post-industrial society,' thus appears as the period in which all branches of the economy are fully industrialized for the first time; to which one could further add the increasing mechanization of the sphere of circulation (with the exception of pure repair services) and the increasing mechanization of the superstructure.[9]

For Jameson, late capitalism entails unprecedented (if not entirely new) modifications of time, space, and subjectivity itself. Its temporality is one of a "series of perpetual presents," an index of a deadly paralysis of historical development and consciousness brought on by a mode of production that demands not only consumption over production, but with this recycling over innovation, pastiche over expression, fungible moments of disconnected and aleatory experience over the appreciation (and ethical consciousness of) processes and the whole as such.

Against the disperse emergence of this "cultural turn," Guy Debord's 1967 *The Society of the Spectacle* is a pungent marker of a substantive reconfiguration of the relations between image and reality that characterizes both the quality of the moment of its publication and the course of developments to come. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord – the *éminence grise* of the Situationist International and, critically, an avid if ambivalent cineast and filmmaker[10] –

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[9] Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 190-191. Cited by Jameson (brackets his) in Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, xiv-xv.

[10] Thomas Y. Levin's "Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord" provides a detailed account of both Debord's filmmaking as a gesture toward the Situationist practice of *détournement* (the reappropriative use of existing material – or better, in the case of the spectacle and the Situationist's guerrilla mode of opposition to it, materiel – so as to critique and undermine the sources from whence it came: hence the use of reappropriated stock footage, particularly from news media and Hollywood productions, in his 1973 cinematic rendering of *The Society of the Spectacle*, replete with Debord's own narration from his text as a counterpoint) and the equal ambivalence of Debord's use of the medium as a homeopathic poison. While one cannot be struck by the degree to which Debord's account of the spectacle and many accounts of the cinema coincide (with the cinema as either an illustration of the spectacle's mechanics or, taken more broadly, as an enabling condition *for* the spectacle as such to have emerged), Levin is keen to note that "The resistance to a facile collapsing of cinema and spectacle is imperative if one is to understand the complex relationship between the Situationist International (SI) and the filmic medium. To the extent that cinema is synonymous with spectacle—a spatialization of time, a staging of separation, a fostering of passivity, alienation, and so on—it is simply unacceptable and must be eliminated. Along with similar forms of spectacle, Debord insists that 'the cinema, too, must be destroyed.' The question remains, however, to what extent the condemnation of cinema here is a critique of the politics of the 'apparatus' analogous to arguments put forth by Martin Heidegger an later by Jean-Louis Baudry and Jean-Louis Comolli regarding the objectification inherent in the very structure of representation. For it might be that what is at issue here is not the cinema as such, but rather a historically specific set of cinematic practices, a certain cinema—classic, commercial, industrialized, narrativized, and so forth. As Debord notes: 'It is society and not technology that has made cinema what it is. The cinema could

was concerned with the increasing disconnect between ideas and everyday life intensifed in the emergence of the culture of the image: a "trick" both of and on bourgeois (or semi- or pseudo-"bourgeoisified") society, the spectacle operates as a mechanism of separation analogous to the capitalistic separation of senses and fragmentation of the sensorium. Proceeding from the basic Marxian formulation that production is both the unthought and unspeakable of capitalism, and more specifically from the early-Lukácsian formulations of reification and totality, Debord argues that the spectacle both introduces and sustains "meaningful" distinctions where there are none (that is, operates on the principle of "useless" separation that is essential to its politics of occultation and is its means of the re-production of the social order in its own image), ultimately distancing not only itself but also its subjects from their sensed complicity with and general consciousness of the politics of real separation (classes, reality, and activity). In sum, the spectacle presents a *false image of totality*, served up for *dispassionate and objective contemplation* (this last also in Lukács' pejorative sense of the term), and as such is both the cause and consequence of the most profoundly deleterious societal ills.[11] The question of *relations*, both conceptual and material (up to and including the relation between these latter), is what is most immediately and intensively problematized in late capitalism: "The spectacle," Debord says, "is not a collection of

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have been historical examination, theory, essay, memories.' This leaves open the possibility of an alternative sort of cinematic activity incompatible with the economy of spectacle, a nonspectacular, antispectacular, or other-than-spectacular cinema. Such a realm of possibility is the precondition of what one might call Situationist Cinema." (75) Leaving to the side the complexities of Debord's practice vis-à-vis the movement with which he was associated (a movement that, itself, denied facile definition of means or ends as a matter of principle), to say nothing of the convoluted, speculation-inviting (in a movie-of-the-week, armchair-psychoanalyzing way), unsolved 1984 murder of Debord's filmmaker friend Gérard Lebovici and Debord's subsequent move to withdraw all his films from exhibition and circulation, it is nevertheless clear that the cinema provided for Debord both the model and the mechanism of resistance for what he formulated as "the spectacle." And while Debord's later commentaries on his germinal text (and again to say nothing of the sanctioned redistribution of his films in 1995, less than five weeks after his suicide, and on television, no less!) point to an even-less-than-optimistic vision of the potentialities to be found within the spectacle – and, it could rightly be inferred, the cinema – than he had previously proffered, those potentials both demonstrated and inferable from that earlier text might still be recognized in both the contemporary manifestations of the spectacle and the cinema that continues to inform it.

[11] In his remarkable intellectual biography *Guy Debord* (which I only came across in the late stages of revising this text, after these cursory remarks on Debord were written), Anselm Jappe elaborates Debord's affinity with the Lukács of 1923's *History and Class Consciousness*, going so far as to convincingly argue that not only is Debord best understood as inheriting and extending the legacy of a bygone Hegelian Marxism (as opposed to being situated as a proto-postmodernist, say), but also that in hewing to theses Lukács himself repudiated in his later reflections on his earlier text, Debord in many ways has made those theses bear out in ways Lukács could not have foreseen, affirming the strengths (and some of the weaknesses) of Lukács original work. Rather than substantively emend and expand this text to reflect Jappe's richly detailed account, I instead refer the reader to his text entire.

images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images,"[12] and moreover, "(t)he spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image."[13] The spectacle not only organizes seeing "and" being, but rather organizes seeing *as* being, being only insofar as it is actualized and authorized by the visible and an inexorably politicized relation thereto.

When Debord, in his *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, found it necessary to reiterate and consolidate the terms of his most famous text over twenty years after the fact, he revealed both the prescience of his original formulations and the integrated singularity the spectacle was perhaps destined to achieve. Initially, in *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord aligned the question of the spectacle with a fundamental problematic of power in its virtualization, thus describing an economy of sorts of power and image. On the one hand, he positioned the "concentrated spectacle" alongside "the ideology condensed around a dictatorial personality" (the image of power: a sovereign category); on the other, he named the "diffuse spectacle" that which "represented the Americanisation of the world"[14] (the power of the image in global circulation: an ideological category). In both cases, the image is understood as the nexus of a political (and geopolitical) totality, its functional lever, its mode and means of self-sustaining re/production, and even its proper language and mode of (ultimately monological) communicability. To these two categories, Debord in his later commentary added a third that encompassed and consolidated their characteristics: the contemporary field of the "integrated spectacle." What is significant about the integrated spectacle is its globalized permeation and subsumption of *all* levels of reality, of *all relations in and to reality as such*, no longer confined to the relatively autonomous spheres of the economic and political, and the spheres themselves no longer differentiatable: a tendentially totalizing and globalizing phenomenon under which power and image are fully coordinated (and fundamentally indistinct) in means and ends.

While to a certain degree overdetermined in its determinism and (pace Jameson) not without certain allowances for movement and resistance "on its own terms,"[15] Debord's articulation of the integrated spectacle is critical in how the thought of and deployment of violence is situated in the epistemological, political, and experiential topography of late capitalism. Each of the five features of the integrated spectacle that Debord outlines – "incessant technological renewal; integration of state and economy; generalized secrecy; unanswerable lies; an eternal present"[16] – conforms to and confirms the concerns Jameson, Deleuze, Derrida, Agamben, and others present regarding late capitalism's metastases and effects, its modes, means, and ends of power. But this is not all: at every point, what Debord describes not only corresponds to contemporary American commercial cinema – as a technology of spectacular entertainments at the leading edge of aesthetic and representational techniques, as a corporate entity with vested ideological interests and functions, as a self-occluding system wherein all machinations of production are occulted, and as an ahistorical force with mytho-transcendental alibis – but also to the violent imaginary.

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[12] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 12.

[13] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 24.

[14] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 8.

[15] Indeed, Debord himself notes in *Comments*... that while "(t)he end of history gives power a welcome break," (14) "(t)o [the] list of the triumphs of power we should, however, add one result which as proved negative:

Our periodic indeterminacy also applies to the sphere of local and global social crises carried with this moment in late capitalism: a period of political and representational crises in the face of a confluence of events that would give rise to the complex mediations of and meditations on violence that have persisted, in one form or another, until the present day. The overarching geopolitical frame, is, of course, the deepening of the US-USSR "Cold War," wherein between 1946 and 1966 all manner of complex political and economic relations and events were reduced, in Robert B. Ray's words, to "a series of unconnected, ad hoc showdowns between clearly defined interests."[17] At issue for Ray is the necessity for the cinema to maintain this image – and indeed its success in doing so – despite (and indeed in reaction to) the decadence of the liberal-democratic promise in the dissolution of the classical frontier thesis that, in its valorization of individualism, manifest destiny, regeneration, and limitless productive potentiality, had so long informed it. The result was (and in many ways remains) an uneasy conflation of these classical notions with the emergence of Cold-War forces, together mapped and perpetually remapped onto an increasingly dynamized geopolitical landscape that is not only increasingly hostile in itself,

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once the running of a state involves permanent and massive shortage of historical knowledge, that state can no longer be led strategically." (20, brackets mine)

[16] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 12.

[17] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 248.

but also so to these hitherto essential but overly shopworn ideological and philosophical frames.

If nothing else, the 1969 publication of Hannah Arendt's landmark *On Violence* signals that, in this moment, an uneasy shift has taken place in the socio-political consciousness and function of violence: in the post-nuclear age, violence (or at least the threat thereof) has not only become an ultimate political weapon and the balancing reagent in geopolitical power relations, but also – and in ways that push the sense of violence all the more into the terrain of spectacularity and alterity to the most fundamental of Western ideals – beyond all rationality of ends. Once again (and, arguably, as always), violence is both the point and plane of consistency *across* relations, but now fully atomized into a structure of spectacular deferral and elevated beyond the economicity of its former political and discursive schemes of management to a position it always-already held: as the *ultima ratio* of politics, discourse, and power, at once everywhere and nowhere, as much a structuring force for contemporary relations of all varieties as a destructive (or apocalyptic) one.

Just as importantly, Arendt's treatise minimally suggests that the spectacularization of politics has supplanted the notion and utility of ethics (being the rationalist appraisal of the relation between means and ends, the algebra of justice and right) – and not so much as a matter of course or force as a general dissolution *of* the ethical in a more classical (even moral) sense of the debt to heeding consequence beyond the immediacy of the immediate: violence, requiring as it does the notion of the individual, all the more apocryphal and unlocalizable in the latter's e/vacuation. The old moral or ethical verities that governed the implementation of state violence no longer hold in this general state of violence's delocalization and dissolution, which as its precondition and consequence entails the very death of "the unified" that, crucially, is both the *raison d'être* for the enduring utilitarian concept of violence and which, in its absence, requires its "presence" all the more desperately. The fact that politics and ethics stand as antinomies in the public consciousness in late capitalism (a consequence of the well-publicized decadence of governmental practices and autonomy in the corporate media age) is therefore critical and, indeed, productive to the ends of power: this move has been accompanied by an intensified (though certainly false) investment in providential sovereignty, indistinguishably of the market or of the state, which nominally guarantees and demands the enduring power of that locally-failing state in the expanding geopolitical landscape. Displacing nuanced questions of ethicality on the part of power in that landscape and reinforcing a neo-Machiavellian politics of ends, the demonstrability of power, from the atomic bomb to Technicolor napalm, becomes the sufficient justification for deployment and expression of that power: in other words, the relentless and necessary deployment and visibility of means. The political problem of violence (that is, the problem violence poses to politics when the latter is both the means and the end of the former, rather than the other way around), then, is both a mirror of and of a functional piece with the representational politics, and intrinsic violence, of the spectacle. Because the spectacle is essentially violent, and because its self-transparency is paramount to its functions (including its violence), it and its apparatuses – including and particularly the cinema – find their central tension and corrective task in a manifest obsession with violence: categorically regulating it in ways both revealing and displacing, but always distracting from its own.

And against this backdrop, in this moment Hollywood also finds itself at the height of a fundamental reorganization in its transition from a monopolistic studio model in financial, aesthetic, and cultural decline into its contemporary corporate mode of production, a process begun in 1959 by Universal Studios and accelerated between 1966 and 1969, when the remaining four of the studio-era's "big five" studios (Warner Bros., MGM, Paramount, and United Artists) followed suit and transferred their ownership to multinational corporate entities. Coinciding with the much-heralded emergence of the "New (or, even more problematically in its own ways, "post-classical") Hollywood cinema," this shift precipitated the reformation and reassertion of the MPAA as a governing body and, in the absence of a valid Production Code, the introduction of its current regulatory ratings system and board (the Classification and Ratings Administration, or CARA) in 1968. The institution of the ratings system and CARA was of course a pointed reaction to the 1967 release of Arthur Penn's landmark *Bonnie and Clyde*, a wildly popular and widely acclaimed film that served as a "troubling" marker of the state of public consciousness of politics, class and violence, carrying through with the regulatory and representational crises posed by Mike Nichol's 1966 *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in something of a *coup de grace* to the institution's means of regulating content through explicit admonitions. It is hardly coincidental that the corrective recodified regulation of Hollywood cinema would be at this moment (the height of the

Vietnam conflict, the dawn of the multinational corporate age, and the fading of Classical Hollywood in the face of both) and in reaction to the ways in which violence itself was rendered in this film, with its concerted emphases on the effects of violence both corporeal (the previously verboten detailed rendering of gunshot wounds, replete with flumes of blood) and, perhaps more problematically, systemic (the film's subtext, if only that, of the violence that inheres in and results from socio-economic inequities). And in light of the failure of explicit and transparent prohibition, the new regulatory ratings system adopted a telling logos: uncodified judgment behind closed doors, each judgment by CARA's twelve anonymous members an *arbitrary, case-by-case decision of acceptable inclusivity vis-à-vis the totality of the set*, each decision as to what may or may not be presented, what does or does not "go too far" in a given film an exercise of *sovereign power* of the sort described by Giorgio Agamben as proper to an age where the power of the particular decision and not the rule of universal law has become the order of the day.

To be sure, *Bonnie and Clyde*'s celebrated status as something of a rupture of the Hollywood tradition is qualifiable. It certainly ushered a new mode of regulation (arguably the film's enduring legacy, alas), and just as certainly brought to the American mainstream the kinds of expressive aesthetic experimentation and expressly political content that had marked the European scene for decades. Yet as Ray quite rightly notes, this "most important of the new American movies … resembled a pastiche of New Wave effects,"[18] and despite what appeared as a "break" in Hollywood's formal, thematic, and ideological continuity,

> (c)lose inspection … would have revealed that Hollywood's procedures remained intact. First, the new movies' explicit sex and violence and odd, off-key endings were still contained in formally closed narratives [and] could be appreciated as genre pictures … Nor had Hollywood disowned the use of stars. (…) Despite its obvious stylistic pyrotechnics, the American Cinema also remained formally conservative, surrounding the borrowed New Wave devices with long stretches that completely conformed to traditional continuity rules. More important, in the 1960s, the increasingly rapid dissemination of every cinematic innovation quickly co-opted the power of all but the most radical departures, converting the New Wave's revelatory defamiliarizations … into mere cosmetic flourishes assimilable by Hollywood's conventional forms.[19]

That the cinematic point of departure for this project can hardly be understood as a definitive "break" with enduring tendencies (and, indeed, in not carrying through with what could have been a radicalized break with its traditions and conditions of possibility, quite rapidly became reabsorbed back into the logistics which gave it birth and breath) is more than a lamentable foreclosure of a potential reimagining of American cinema: it suggests that such a break was perhaps an impossibility from the beginning. While *Bonnie and Clyde*'s formal and thematic radicalism is in many ways overestimated and overesteemed, the industry's reactions to it (and especially in light of its popularity) speak volumes about both the crises of legitimation and popular consciousness it signaled and, more importantly, the degree to which "fixing the problem of violence" seems to be understood as *the* key in their resolution. Subsequent developments on the Hollywood cinematic scene – particularly resettlements of that relatively-radicalized "New Hollywood" into the classical thematic and formal terrain from which it had ostensibly "broken," buttressing the industry's hegemonic control over the parameters of acceptable content via CARA's ideal-bourgeois constituency and the MPAA's inescapable domestic distributional/economic consequences for "disorderly conduct" on the part of filmmakers who wish to produce, distribute, market, and exhibit their product within the new multinational-corporate model – are not to be underestimated in this regard: they too contributed to the necessary continuity and consistency vis-à-vis violence and late capitalism that commercial cinema seems particularly wont and apt to provide, and that to no small extent guarantees its enduring social functions.

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[18] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 289.
[19] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 289.

A parallel might thus be noted here between the systemic restabilization of Hollywood (itself viewed, as it would certainly view itself, in historiographically narratological terms: recovering from its crisis stronger than before) and the extensory effects of the texts it produces vis-à-vis the audience, whose own crises of experience found, as always, certain degrees of palliative succor in such "returns to form." Indeed, the persistence of not simply Hollywood's "old forms and ways," or even its rapid return to hegemony through the 1970s, but *of Hollywood cinema itself*, is absolutely critical for still taking the medium seriously as a powerful and culturally integral institution. And this is crucial, for one might rightly ask: *why cinema*, as opposed to other visual media (and especially the other "usual suspects" in these debates: television and video games) that also inform and transform our relation to violence, more specifically, why *this* cinema, and indeed, why do these matters warrant yet another (perhaps too tried and tired) examination? Anticipating the inquiries of Chapter Two and in the most basic terms for the time being, an apologia is warranted as to why the cinema, even in its recent, supposed "decline" and diffusion in the face of other technologies of the visual, remains a primary and emblematic locus for the debates about violent media and for a more comprehensive understanding of the image of violence they (and we) rely upon.

Of no small consequence in this regard is how this cinema – as, of course, all cinemas do in their own historically- and culturally-specific ways – has persisted in fulfilling the medium's longstanding role of synthesizing meaning and restoring order in periods of crisis, if not always in the most idealistic ways. Certainly, the means by which this cinema continues to fulfill this function is in its abiding reliance on what could be most simply characterized as affirmative "wish-fulfillment narratives" that work to symbolically resolve the contradictions of social conditions and experience: cinematic narratives as problem-solving machines that as often as not create their own problems to solve, on their own terms, and with damning consequences for political engagement, cultural activity, and thought in general. For the greatest part, this cinema can rightfully be understood as not mediating but distracting from real crises of experience, offering an ideologically-saturated image of the world not as it is, but messianically as it "should (even could) be," sublimating real desires for difference into acceptable and ordered images instrumentally governed and formally organized by causal and re-solving logic, creating in themselves a hermetic ideality in lockstep with the objective conditions necessary for the maintenance of the status quo: in short, entertainment in the mode of Huxleyan soma, a "socially useful distraction" which, as Neil Postman has so famously stated, is the means by which we are all-too happily "amusing ourselves to death," even in the face of death itself.

In this, it is essential to highlight the fact that this cinema is not simply "commercial" but, owing to Hollywood's subsumption into the multinational marketplace throughout the 1960s, specifically corporate in its mode of production and in its abiding logic. In response to Nobel laureate Milton Friedman's hallmark maxim that a corporation's only extrinsic moral obligation is to its capital organs, the shareholders, fellow economist Robert Monks argues in Michael Bakan's book *The Corporation* (later, and perhaps perfectly appropriately if not with some degree of synergistic irony, adapted into a documentary film), that the corporation so defined is at base a coolly logical, psychopathological "externalizing machine" that absents from its field of operations any thought or consideration which interferes with its primary purpose of profitability, self-preservation and self-perpetuation.[20] In other words, the operative logic of the corporation partakes in a politics of pure ends, wherein the means to those ends are always-already justified and thus exempt from ethical critique in light of the pure and mythic good upon which they will open: the doctrines of manifest destiny and sovereign right to self-determination and self-preservation so fundamental to the frontier thesis, to the liberal-democratic promise, and to late capitalism itself that frames all deleterious effects connected to production and consumption as "collateral damage" necessary to the achievement of a higher (and apocalyptically messianic) end. A refined and expansive Taylorism, essentially axiomatic and thoroughly Machiavellian, this corporate logic is embedded in the very fabric of the contemporary commercial cinematic text, all the more enabling and authorizing this cinema's complicity with the violent imaginary as a function of necessity: the deflection of responsibility, the denial of maleficent effects, and, corresponding with the specific modality of sovereign power Giorgio Agamben describes as proper to our time, the exceptionalizing exclusionary practices which maintain only the most profitable processes and conceptualizations.

While throughout this study Gilles Deleuze will offer a less deterministic (if more philosophically idealistic) account of the cinema's potentialities in the face of crisis that to some extent can be applied to contemporary American film, this cinema's particular philosophical thrust, affirmative power, and tendential force toward establishing and maintaining planes of consistency cannot be underestimated. For as Ray rightly notes of American cinema's enduring power to shape social consciousness via its stock set of formal and ideological means that emphasize continuity, coherence, clarity, and plenitude, "historical events alone could not discredit Classic Hollywood's traditional forms; only the audience's perception of events as anomalous could raise that challenge, and in the post-war period, the traditional categories had forestalled such perceptions from developing."[21] Moreover, despite the concentration of crises that marked the decade and continue to haunt us to this day, Ray claims it also to be the case that

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[20] Bakan, *The Corporation – The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, 20. Monks' analogy signals the implicit violence here: "(T)he corporation … is an externalizing machine, in the same way that a shark is a killing machine."

[21] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 248.

> the culture's collective means of dealing with that experience...could not be overthrown by events alone. Only the advent of a decisively new, and widely accepted, way of perceiving events could accomplish that revolution. A 'break' in the continuity of American Cinema, to use Hodgson's term, could, therefore, only follow a 'break' in the American ideological projection."[22]

Quite distinct from the ruptures in the very category of representation on the European front in response to social crises (in the shape of Italy's *Neorealismo* and the French *Nouvelle Vague*, which for a figure like Deleuze indicate wholesale philosophical and political reorganizations in the relation between movement, time, and image), the force of *this* cinema's "reconciliatory patterns" vis-à-vis whatever historical event proved as powerful and consistent as ever in the post-war/Cold War period and beyond: as Ray concludes,

> (t)he postwar period ... reconfirmed two basic facts about the American Cinema: first, the movies responded less to historical events than to the audience's culturally mediated perceptions of such events; second, Hollywood's adopted mythology [essentially informed by the frontier thesis] had proved extraordinarily adaptable. In specific terms, the thematic and formal paradigms were remarkably durable and the audience remarkably attracted to them.[23]

Such a dynamic, of course, is always at stake in any culture-industrial scenario, and is all the more pronounced vis-à-vis Hollywood's overwhelmingly overwhelming, meticulously engineered, relentlessly affirmative product: product transparently offered as product, and quite consciously designed to these very ends of the stabilization and consumable mediation of otherwise real and pressing concerns, a resolution in and as the kind of pure undisturbed ideological projection Ray describes, and infinitely re/productive. Speaking of cinematic formal/narratological matters that apply equally to the industrial and ideological, Richard Maltby (channeling Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry thesis) remarks in *Hollywood Cinema* that

> (t)he re-establishment of order renders the viewer's experimentation with expressive behavior a matter of no consequence, contained within the safe, unexplored, unconsidered, and trivialized space of entertainment. In that space, stories are governed not by their own developmental logic, but by the logic of a conventionalized, generic morality, which ensures that entertainment functions as a process of 'recreation,' by which, as the authors of the Production Code put it, 'a

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[22] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 251.
[23] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 249. Brackets mine.

> man rebuilds himself after work, after his labor, during which he gets a chance to rebuild himself physically … morally, spiritually and intellectually.[24]

As much despite as because of its representational politics and processes of displacement and concealment vis-à-vis labor, ideology, expenditure and exchange, Maltby succinctly notes that "(m)ore than any other cinema, Hollywood makes its industrial and economic negotiations with its audience explicit,"[25] and his conclusion is both cogent and the ultimate rationale for this study for the focus upon this specific body of texts:

> Precisely because of [those explicit negotiations], Hollywood can become the paradigm for an examination of the material relationships between texts and the audiences and critics who encounter and engage them, not just in cinema, but in other media and other historical moments.[26]

The point here is that while, on the one hand, the politics and mechanics of cinematic construction, presentation, and reception rely unwaveringly upon the furtively occulted mechanics and transparent logic of commodity fetishism and commoditized desire, on the other hand this cinema, like the mode of production to which it so intimately immanently belongs, also needs no longer conceal these motivations and machinations (obvious enough, in terms of the latter, in the image-frenzy of commodity culture, and in terms of the former in those oft-celebrated "ruptures" of the continuity system that are themselves nothing more or less than a parallel move in relation to and collusion with that culture). In spectacular society, the central paradox is precisely that these transparencies become opaque, the predominance of the visible gives rise to scotomae and a generally narrowed field of vision, heightened and intensively and intently focused on a determined, certain, yet inclusively pliable set of fields and forms. And while this paradox has terrible consequences for how violence is politically mobilized and justified, per the "baleful universal visibility" Jameson describes it is also one in which all keys, clues, cues and connective tissue are in substantive ways not really hidden at all, but rather in the open and unabashed, banalized by their visibility to be sure but not in any way unrecognizable or, for that matter, subtle. And this, ultimately, is precisely why approaching commercial film (rather than, say, more esoteric or, for whatever reasons, generally unseen "independent" or "experimental" texts) is all the more justified as, in Jameson's words, "that medium where, if at all, some change in the … character of social reality ought to be detectable, since social reality and the stereotypes of our experience of everyday social reality are the raw material with which commercial film … are inevitably forced to work," where we might witness and exploit "the emergence of profound formal contradictions to which the public cannot not be sensitive, whether or not it yet possesses the conceptual instruments to understand what those contradictions mean."[27]

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[24] Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 20. His citation is: Father Daniel A. Lord, SJ, Reporter's Transcript of a meeting of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, February 10, 1930, p. 11. Production Code File, Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., Archive, New York City.

[25] Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 29.

[26] Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 29. Brackets mine.

With this, a final note needs to be made regarding the problematic question (and especially so for post-classical Hollywood cinema) of *genre*. Detailed questions of generic violence are not addressed here, for reasons both pragmatic and methodological. Pragmatically speaking, the genre-specific modes of cinematic violence are too vast for the present study: while certain genres are indeed defined by certain modes and means of re/presenting violence (the western, the horror film, the fantasy film, the slapstick comedy, the drama, etc. each staking out specific narratological, ideological, and affective territory) the confounding and chimaeras intermingling of traditional genres in late-capitalist (or, perhaps to use the term in its most appropriate aesthetic sense, "postmodern"[28]) Hollywood cinema only makes the task more complex and, I am inclined to believe, more irrelevant. Methodologically speaking, this study seeks to attend the question of violence in this cinema as a *metageneric* question, one which lies more in systematic maneuvers that are specific to Hollywood cinema in general than in any particular genre, as an immanent property of the medium in relation to its exchanges with the larger field of our mode of production.

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[27] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 38.

[28] "Postmodernity" (and its myriad "isms") is certainly something of a problematic index here. Throughout this study, I have attempted to keep the concept of late capitalism at a distance from the far more imprecise – and certainly far more contested – concepts of "postmodernism" and "postmodernity" which are often held as coterminous with late capitalism in general, even if only (and properly) as aesthetic and epistemological coextensions of the latter. It is in this latter sense, and in its fullest restriction and sense of discretion, that these "posts" will rear their heads here, not because they are invalid categories so much as because this study seeks to attend the deeper structure beneath them, a structure that not only persists, but was indeed the determinate condition for those aesthetic movements and seeming potentialities ("the death of narratives," "the death of the subject," "the free play of signification," even "the end of history") which were, to varying degrees, very clearly prematurely and often excessively celebrated. This is not to say that the prevailing aesthetic, or indeed the prevailing philosophy, of a given time works then to determinately or uniformly shape its time in its own image; indeed, such movements of thought and artistic production are only possible given determinate conditions of possibility which to my mind are most properly informed by economic power and its apparatuses. Rather, it is more simply to say that to begin to be mired in the discussion of a "postmodern aesthetic", or even an "aesthetic postmodernism" (at once a redundancy of terms and an oxymoron), already begins to distract from the point, and particularly in a time where the surface-level effects present themselves simultaneously as fully engaged with and fully autonomous from the historical conditions from which they arise; while not a dead-end street by any means, it is most certainly a detour that cannot be well-afforded when considering matters as dire as the very violence *of* late capitalism.

In this, I have taken Maltby's terse statement that "Hollywood is a generic cinema, which is not quite the same as saying that it is a cinema of genres"[29] quite literally at its word, preferring here instead to pay greater heed to metageneric principles and practices – or what Ray elliptically calls the "certain tendencies" – of this cinema, and even across the Classical/Post-classical "divide." Indeed, while this study is directly invested in a very particular cinema of a very particular era, because we might note (as Ray does, and rightly so) the persistence of "classical" formal and ideological tendencies in "this cinema," there will be much here that (for lack of a better term) transcends these nominal historiographical specificities, that call to what this cinema's historically enduring and abiding constitution, functions, and formations have presented, as much a movement against the tide of forces of historical transformation and a site of resistance to the specific moments it contends with as a force in collusion with those moments and movements.

So while this study, let alone these prefatory remarks, is not the place for the most comprehensive of explorations into the web that the cinema has spun in the brief and turbulent century it has both inhabited and brought to its contemporary fruition, we might at least acknowledge here that the conditions of the late capitalism have certainly come to significantly impact the functions of the cinema. This is particularly evident at the level of its formal aesthetics and syntax, with the "properly postmodern film," such as it may be called (and much less codified), emphasizing a relative if ultimately spurious non-linearity and discontinuity in narrative and formal qualities, and hence more or less recognizable as some kind of reconfiguration in the thought and experience of temporality, spatiality, and subjectivity vis-à-vis the fragmentation of a world "out of joint." But perhaps more importantly, the cinema's very place and function within the crowded media landscape in the latter half of the twentieth century has been both problematized and affirmed, making Bazin's epic ontological question – "What is Cinema?" – once again relevant, and, insofar as the cinema can be understood as exercising its own determinate force upon the epistemological, political, and experiential characteristics of our time, demanding that we take Deleuze's provocative statement closing *Cinema II: The Time-Image* – that "we must no longer ask ourselves, 'What is cinema?', but instead, 'What is philosophy?'"[30] – all the more seriously.

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[29] Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 107.

In other terms, this involves as much an immanentist approach to understanding the relationship between violence and cinema in this epoch as something of an ontological question that comes to bear on the relation between the cinema and what could be called its "proper objects," none of which more so than violence. As a singularly bourgeois "point of access" to the violences excluded or expunged from everyday, "civilized experience" and as a machine complicit in the perpetration of perhaps more substantive (and certainly less tangible) structural and systemic violences, the cinema is indubitably entwined with these ideological processes of distantiation and occultation, if not in the end solely responsible for them. But at the same time, and especially given the coincidences and relations between the medium and the epistemological, political, and experiential conditions of late capitalism, it is also precisely within and through the cinema that violence, as delicate as it is obstinate and singular, is conceptually reinvested and, however problematically, once again made meaningful.

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[30] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 280.

THE VIOLENT IMAGINARY:
EXCLUSION, EXCEPTION, ACCOMMODATION

> *Framing is the art of choosing the parts of all kinds which become part of a set. This set is a closed system, relatively and artificially closed. The closed system determined by the frame can be considered in relation to the data that it communicates to the spectators: it is 'informatic', and saturated or rarefied. Considered in itself and as limitation, it is geometric or dynamic-physical. (...) It is an optical system when it is considered in relation to the point of view, to the angle of framing: it is then pragmatically justified, or lays claim to higher justifications. Finally, it determines an out-of-field, sometimes in the form of a larger set which extends it, sometimes in the form of a whole into which it is integrated.*[31]
>
> Gilles Deleuze
> *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*

> *We tell ourselves stories in order to live. ... We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely ... by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.*[32]
>
> Joan Didion
> *The White Album*

From the terrible miasma of what violence "is," "can be," and "may yet be" arises an imaginary which necessarily, and in many ways *cinematically*, frames and continually reframes both the image and the actuality of violence "as we know it." While we have at our disposal an incredibly complex language and schemes of definition for violence, for all the wordplay (and, more importantly, image-play) that constitutes this knowledge, the resultant *concept* of violence, articulated and rearticulated at all levels and in all registers of discourse, is paradoxically very simple in terms of its basic concerns. By the terms of this imaginary, violence is considered "in reality" primarily as a phenomenal event or irruption of continuity or order (of law, of civility, of the social code, and so forth), and "in representation" primarily as a thing: in either case, more as an object than a concept or condition, observed and understood at a distance, as a singular set (in the mathematical sense) of acts and actors, and, critically, rarely if ever as a systemic property of material and discursive relations. With this externalizing-objectivizing frame in place, violence is able to be thought purely in terms of legal and nominalist categories which establish the frame-work for taxonomies of violence not unlike those imposed upon the totality of the natural world, and which ultimately tend

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[31] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 18.
[32] Didion, *The White Album*, 11.

(as everything from crime statistics to wartime body counts to the raw data from which so many descries of the prominence of violence in contemporary media proceed) toward objective, empirical quantifiability and categorical nominalization, as acts (an axiomatically infinite variety of means of physical violence, if less so in terms of non-physical violence, against "your money or your life"), agents (at least two identified and legally inscribed agents, a victim and a perpetrator), and effects (rested on the verifiable destructive effects on bodies or objects, the visible and legally admissible evidence).

So paradoxically enough given its tendentially axiomatic conceptual fluidity, "violence" has in many ways become too *small* a word to contain all it might entail (can this word, this one word, consolidate and comprehend so many machinations and events, so many means to violent ends?), yet it nonetheless comprises something of a conceptual clearinghouse for all kinds of acts and relations, indexing and warehousing them according to their relative but historically determinate political utility. To limit the field of potential inclusive definitions, the violent imaginary operatively *excludes* from our consideration certain processes, practices, events and effects that might otherwise be called violence, makes *exceptions* for certain kinds of "acceptable" violence in certain conditions or situations, and relies on preexisting operative codes of understanding (those connected with other imaginaries which come to bear on matters of identity, morals, class, race, gender, nationality, etc.) which allow us to *accommodate* violence to our thought and understanding, rather than the other way around. It is in this contested and unstable terrain, relatively stabilized and framed before the fact as an objective matter that can be approached as such, that we most commonly think and are even able to unproblematically "enjoy" (that is, "consume") violence.

By these basic terms, the violent imaginary is both operationally complicit with Debord's understanding of the spectacle (where the image, as capital, is the expression and extension of the economic base and thus the necessary point of contact between economic reality and ideological correction) and with what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the fundamental (il)logic of how capitalism itself operates: on the one hand, it is systemically transparent in its operations: "In capitalism … nothing is secret, at least in principle and according to the code;" on the other, "nothing is *admissible*."[33] In this structure of exclusion, exception, and accommodation, a basic set of exclusions set the field, justifying further exceptions in the service of overall accommodations: per Agamben's provocative but all-too-verifiable claim that in the space of modern political relations, the state of exception is the rule, *the violent imaginary is a dynamic but nonetheless strictly managed and authorless axiomatic economy, where the fundamental principle is not admission and inclusion, but exclusion and exception.*

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[33] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 263.

And it is in these points of contact that we find the primary point of refraction for considering how these problematics not only are, but in many ways can (and should) be considered in late capitalism. In short, *the violent imaginary (as our point of common access to "violence") is fundamentally informed by and of a piece with our prevailing mode of production, and consequently cannot be thought apart from it and the epistemological, political, and experiential crises of which it is a corrective consequence and with which it is complicit.* The "problem of violence" under these conditions is mediated and stabilized by the violent imaginary, and ultimately is less that of a wholesale change in the thought of violence "itself" than of the destabilization of the myriad legitimizing structures – legal, sovereign, subjectival, and discursive – that define and draw their legitimizing power from it. These multiple crises of legitimation (to borrow Habermas' term) threaten always to disturb the thought of violence and its sovereign legitimacy, to destabilize the imaginary which accords violence certain (and this is doubly, ambivalently articulated as both absolute *and* provisional) forms and functions, and to undo the intricate matrices to which violence, while externalized, is integral. The violent imaginary, then, is an intrinsic and essential (by-)product of those sites and means of production which absolutely necessitate it: any system – economic, epistemological, ideological, representational, philosophical – which entails and entertains a certain relation to violence (which is to say, in the broadest but most concise terms, *all systems*) absolutely requires and unwaveringly relies upon the violent imaginary. And as with all imaginaries, that surrounding violence most intimately and desperately attends the unthought, unthinkable, or unrevealable of a system: the fundamental limitations of a system vis-à-vis its conditions of possibility and, perhaps particularly in the case of violence, *the condition of possibility that is also its fundamental limit.*

This *immanentist perspective* – holding that the determining force in any complex of interacting forces is intrinsic to its constituent parts and the necessary functional relations and contradictions therebetween – is crucial in situating the violent imaginary's intimately linked *modus operandi* and instrumental necessity. While the violent imaginary has ideological functions and effects, it is not to be understood as a remapping of the structure of ideology in the sense of a false or deluded consciousness, but rather along more specifically Althusserian lines as the naturalization of mediated relations that arises from the necessity for a totality of systemic operations and knowledges to absent or exclude their contradictions and limitations, their production and their historicity: in other words, as the fluid and strategic production of a coherent, totalizing, and "all-inclusive" image. In the final analysis, this situation is as much a complicating factor (violence, like the image today, is tautological and singular: per Althusser, we are never so much within the violent imaginary as when we claim to position ourselves outside it) as a boon. For the face of violence and its imaginary in late capitalism are, as (and indeed alongside) American cinema's persistent "certain tendencies," for the most part "unchanged" in their essential character: that is, this imaginary, as a mythicization of the concept, has become one of the few truly "stable" planes of consistency across historio-epistemic shifts and within the myriad crises that late capitalism presents, and indeed allows for all other kinds of consistencies to be maintained. In short, violence is for better or worse an impermeable, durable, and, in the last analysis, thoroughly transcendentalized conceptual construct that *by necessity* has endured as an organizing principle, both originary to and an effect of structural relations of difference and inequity – and for its part this necessity tells us everything we need to know about the centrality and primacy of violence to all relations, about the political implications of its proper management, and about the absolute necessity to take violence as it is presented with the utmost seriousness.

It is not enough, therefore, to say that the violent imaginary is mere sophistry or vulgar-ideological deception. Indeed, it is both far more insidious than this (deriving, exploiting, and perverting its tenets from those of the philosophy of violence) and more productive (this imaginary, like any other, tells us a great deal about the conditions of possibility and necessity that gave it rise, and its occulted mediations of violence belie the basic conceptual and material realities from which it wishes to disconnect itself). The violent imaginary holds within its bonds the most archaic, the most atavistic notions of self and other, of law and justice, of subject and object, distilled and refined to their most instrumentalizable forms, reduced and resolved to terms by which they can enter into and accommodate whatever political valences are necessary, whatever general equivalences are demanded. Thus relegating it to the status of an empty or unfounded imaginary is an injustice to its injustices, dismissive of its dismissals, and overlooks the crucial nexus of the commodification and reification of concepts in late capitalism and its spectacular society.

Moreover, in its fundamental processes of exclusion, exception, and accommodation, in its qualities of distraction from and occultation of the processes of production (indeed, from process at all), *the violent imaginary is always-already cinematic*, a fundamental affinity between the cinema and violence from which Chapter Two proceeds, and which will permit us to understand the prevalence of violence in this cinema as both a tracer and a critical determinant of the former's thought. In the most general sense, this is exactly to reiterate Jean-Louis Baudry's famous proposition that the cinematographic apparatus corresponds to the structure of ideology conceived by Althusser. But in more specific terms, this constitutional and operational correspondence is crucial, inasmuch as it is not enough to say that the cinema informs and extends the violent imaginary "after the fact," as a kind of specialized ideological apparatus, nor, as is often the case in debates of the vulgar-aestheticization variety, that it is simply the case that violence has been "made cinematic" by this cinema alone. This is also quite different, from the other end of things, than saying that the thought of the cinematic is prolusory to the thought of violence, or that the cinema as institution and as medium necessarily arose, borne of the kind of Promethean idealism that André Bazin proposed in his "myth of total cinema," alongside or in relation to the history of violence, as Paul Virilio traces in somewhat different terms by tracing side-by-side, in relative autonomous leaps and progression, the development of technologies and techniques of warfare and cinema. What this *is* to say is that there is a clear, recognizable, and abiding affinity between the image of violence and, more than "the cinema" *per se*, "the cinematic" as an interested but at base *neutral* field of material and aesthetic techniques and ontological drives, however much these have been instrumentally corralled to contemporary Hollywood cinema's decidedly affirmative tendencies and ideologized ends.

But certainly, all of this only gets us halfway at best, inasmuch as we too are still more in the terrain of defining the problem *of* the thing (that is, the problems that arise from and in relation to violence) than "the thing itself" (that is, what violence "is" in the first place, by the terms of the structure that constitutes it as a problem). Perhaps unsurprisingly, within this miasma and the terms of its articulation (and, indeed, disarticulation), violence has increasingly become banalized and reinflected to the point that it has lost not only its conceptual potentiality and urgency, but also, and perhaps most importantly, its comprehensibility within the political sphere at a time when such a comprehensibility is most necessary. For this, as so many have observed in so many different ways, is indeed an age *of* violence, saturated with violence "real" and "represented," empirically and structurally, socially and subjectivally, geopolitically and – particularly inasmuch as we all are always-already both complicit within and subjects of spectacular society's microscopic incisions of the everyday – micropolitically, and always, however distantly it may seem, with very real effects. The *matter of things* is what is always at stake for the violent imaginary, and for this present endeavor as well.

And so we might turn now to the most pressing matter before us, regarding the question this imaginary answers to without answering at all: "what is, and what isn't, violence – and why?"

PART I

CHAPTER ONE
THAT TERRIBLE "CONCEPT"

CHAPTER TWO
A VIOLENT MACHINE?

CONCEPTS & CONSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER ONE
THAT TERRIBLE "CONCEPT"

> *Violence is now a difficult word, because its primary sense is of physical assault, as in 'robbery with violence', yet it is also used more widely in ways that are not easy to define. (...) It is then clearly a word that needs early specific definition, if it is not ... to be done violence to – to be wrenched from its meaning or significance...* [1]
>
> Raymond Williams
> *Keywords*

> *To return, as to the only possible point of departure to the intentional phenomenon in which the other appears as other, and lends itself to language, to every possible language, is perhaps to give oneself over to violence, and to make oneself its accomplice at least, and to acquiesce – in the critical sense – to the violence of the fact; but in question, then, is an irreducible zone of factuality, an original, transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice, even supposed by ethical nonviolence. Is it meaningful to speak of a preethical violence? If the transcendental "violence" to which we allude is tied to phenomenality itself, and to the possibility of language, it then would be embedded in the root of meaning and logos, before the latter had to be determined as rhetoric, psychagogy, demagogy, etc.*[2]
>
> Jacques Derrida
> "Violence and Metaphysics"

> *Thus as a beginning it is absolutely essential to tear the symbolic from its own imaginary and return to it as a look. To tear from it, but not completely, or at least not in the sense of ignoring it and fleeing from it (fearing it): the imaginary is also what has to be* rediscovered *precisely in order to avoid being swallowed up by it: a never ending task.*[3]
>
> Christian Metz
> *The Imaginary Signifier*

THE QUESTION & THE TASK

On the face of things, the question that confronts us here – *What is* (and what *isn't*) *violence?* – is quite simple. The task here is also, on the face of things, quite simple: to attempt to understand how violence both *is* and *is permitted to be* thought within the conditions of late capitalism and spectacular society. But insofar as this task is both limited and made possible by the challenges put forth by both the concept of violence "itself" (and beyond the concertedly incomplete terms of the violent imaginary) and the conditions of its constitution and apprehension (and particularly in the "postmodern" miasma of legitimation crises and spectacular separation), the question, for all its seeming simplicity, has less to do with what violence *is* – an ontological question opening on its essential noumenal and phenomenal qualities – as what and how we know violence *to be* – an epistemological question potentially opening on everything *but* "violence itself," which we have already indicated is the key operation of the violent imaginary.

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[1] Williams, *Keywords*, 329-331.

[2] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 125.

[3] Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 4. Emphases his.

So while the question may be simple enough to simply pose, the task of answering *to* it anything but, precisely because it *cannot* be posed simply, as such. Indeed, the predicate of the question is itself predicated on the deepest notions of alterity: alterity to reason, to discourse, to power, to law, to force, to speech, to representation, and indeed to thought itself. There is a resistance here, even a mutual repulsion, that makes every point of contact with violence one at a certain distance, one of a certain and perhaps necessary non-encounter: a relation of non-relation, a relation of inclusive exclusion. In this, the violent imaginary and all it buttresses and attends is not so very far from even the critical thought of violence, its means and ends discernible but not indistinguishable from those of that which might oppose it. Consequently, the task at hand is also significantly more difficult than it initially appears: to affirm that violence is a reality that girds and structures others, but to resist codifying or defining violence in ways that would reinscribe upon it the mytho-transcendent terms of the violent imaginary; to affirm the inadequacy of any conceptualization of violence that absolutely appeals to its absolute alterity while at the same time resisting the impulse to substantively deny the validity of any of these conceptualizations; to recognize that the thought and reality of violence are historiocultural products of epistemological, political, and experiential specificities and exigencies and to proceed in good faith.

Violence is a terrible concept indeed – and not least because it may be, by its very alterity to rationalist means of comprehension, inconceptualizable – and speaking of it, if it is spoken of at all, is at once the most terrible and most necessary undertaking that, from the outset, must not simply be willing to tread indeterminate and perhaps impossible terrain, but to embrace that indeterminacy and impossibility as its condition of possibility and its foremost ethical mandate. But to begin to explore the conditions that constitute something of an "answer" to the question (an answer, it cannot be stressed enough, that does not constitute a *conclusion*, but that is constituted as a *response*), we must first attend (an attending, it also cannot be stressed enough, that does not seek to usher away or defeat the challenge of the task, but to take it as the condition of possibility for the question) those parameters that constrain and inform the question, always anterior to its being posed.

In other words, we both must and can only *regard* violence in the spirit of Jacques Derrida: with an inevitably objectifying glance, actively and vigilantly tempered with an acknowledgement of the ethical imperatives and scotomae that glance also inevitably carries with it.[4] Indeed, to begin such an inquiry, we might best reframe Gilles Deleuze's maxim on the necessary path for the thought of contemporary cinema in terms that reflect Derrida's inquiries into these matters: *we must no longer ask "what is violence," but "what is philosophy"?*

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[4] In his translator's notes for Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" (in *Writing and Difference*), Alan Bass explains the crucial *double entendre* in Derrida's critique of phenomenology, where he says "More than any other philosophy, *phenomenology*, in the wake of Plato, was to be struck with light. Unable to reduce the last naïveté, the naïveté of the glance, it predetermined Being as object." (85, emphases Derrida's): '"Glance,"' Bass notes, "is the translation of *le regard*. Here, Derrida is playing on the visual metaphors in the Greek derivations of theory (from *theorein*: to look at, behold) and phenomenon (from *phainesthai*: to appear)." (312 n.10) From this, Bass will note the same gesture as an expressly ethical one when Derrida later says, "I know the meaning of the non-theoretical as such (for example, ethics or the metaphysical in Levinas's sense), with a theoretical knowledge (in general), and I respect it as such, as what it is, in its meaning. I have regard for recognizing that which cannot be regarded as a thing, as a façade, as a theorem. I have regard for the face itself." (122)

"SPEAKING OF VIOLENCE…": APORIA, OPACITY, SINGULARITY, DEFERRAL & DEBT

(THE PROBLEMS BEFORE THE QUESTION)

> *If violence is everywhere and if, moreover, the concept, practice, and effects of violence are caught in a structure that the history of religion and philosophy has identified throughout as that of "sacrifice" (of the self and, more often than not, of others), then also all ethico-political decisions can be said to take place under the condition of some submission to – or at best negotiation with – this general economy of "violence."*[5]
>
> Hent de Vries
> "Violence and Testimony"

> *The 'eye of the conscience' and the 'woods of justice' incarnate in the eternal return, and is there any more desperate image for remorse?*[6]
>
> Georges Bataille
> *Story of the Eye*

> *We shall probably have nothing new to say, but we intend to say it at great length…*[7]
>
> Don Marquis
> *The Almost Perfect State*

To be sure, there are many forms in which violence arises or becomes evident and recognizable as such, a litany that might seem inexhaustible and infinitely mutable in scope, with each discourse participating in the violent imaginary's constitution and operations marking its own territory, simultaneously shaping the knowledge and the function of violence. It is also certain enough that in contemporary spectacular society, the violent imaginary has all but fully subsumed and instrumentally reinflected the entire history of violence's many conceptualizations – material, aesthetic, juridical, political, philosophical – into a singular, if still slippery, mytho-transcendental concept. Disengaging violence from these codificatory inflections and their taxonomies of recognized and recognizable forms, phenomena, and acts, however, opens on the essentially ontic and no less tendentially transcendental question of what violence "is" in a noumenal sense – a question that in its own reductions is more profoundly limiting in the parameters and constraints both placed upon and embedded within it, a question that repeats and affirms precisely that which it means to interrogate and repudiate, a question that is unanswerable as such, a question in perpetuity, a question that at best speaks to the essence of the problem of violence in its unanswerability, but in this at worst invites a resigned distance from answering to it at all.

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[5] de Vries, "Violence and Testimony," 27.
[6] Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, 99.
[7] Marquis, *The Almost Perfect State*, 5.

To begin to regard the contemporary face of violence, we might best begin with a basic situation of its commonly held and understood conceptual qualities. As Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber note in their introduction to *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*, the most general parameters within and about which violence has been both thought and presented to thought in the latter half of the twentieth century is most simply characterized as follows:

> The Manichean frame of mind that prevailed during the past half century attempted to resolve the issue of violence by associating it with the *other*, generally understood as the *adversary*. The resulting tendency has been to construe violence as the intrusion of an external other upon whatever group, institution, or category one chooses to identify with. Violence, in short, has been widely understood as a violation of the self-same in its purity by an external other.[8]

In this, the dominant operative concept of violence is one that regards the sanctity and sovereignty of the individual or unarily conceived collective, and the sovereign right to defend both as one, above all else. The other-qua-adversary, while always posing a certain threat (and ethical demand) in its relation to the self-same, must be not only repelled in the name of self-determination, but sacrificed: offered up, as it were, as an oblation, as a means to the pure end of the sanctified Self. This necessary counterviolence against the other must be one borne of vigilance, and by these basic agonistic terms of irreducible opposition and continual threat, is nominally always-already justified as a righteous power in reserve for the defense of the inalienable sovereign right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, for "the very notion of democracy [to say nothing of its capitalist entrepreneurial fundament] was held to be largely identical with self-determination."[9]

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the triumphal fall of the spectre of European communism that so clearly informed this structure of thinking violence throughout the Cold War would certainly seem to strike a blow to that structure's sovereign self-evidence. As de Vries and Weber continue to note, in the post-Cold War era

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[8] de Vries & Weber, Introduction, 1.

[9] de Vries & Weber, Introduction, 1. Brackets mine. As Stathis Gourgouris observes, the Western liberal-democratic vision of the modern subject as it emerges in the eighteenth century (and is essentially codified in the US Constitution) is "a primarily legal entity whose external (social) boundaries are sanctioned by a set of 'inalienable' rights and whose internal imagination adheres to the belief that they are indeed inalienable (that they represent one's irrevocable independence before the law, the safeguard of self-determination)." ("Enlightenment and *Paranomia*," 121)

> (i)t becomes more difficult to consider violence to be an act perpetrated by others when in an increasing number of cases it is being practiced in the name of self-determination. Determination of the Self now reveals itself to be what it probably always has been: determination of the Other. Values based upon the ... priority of identity over difference, of sameness over alterity – and such values are perhaps inseparable from the notion of value itself – are demonstrating in practice what thinkers from Nietzsche through Adorno to Levinas and Derrida have long suspected: that violence is not necessarily the exclusive characteristic of the other but rather, and perhaps even above all, a means through which the self, whether individual or collective, is maintained.[10]

The problem posed by the post-Cold War situation is twofold: first in the seeming dissolution of the overarching structure of opposition (in sum, the absence of the duly-monikered "Evil Empire") and second in the delocalization of the Self in the Other's seeming absence. All of this, of course, has not in the slightest posed a significant problem from a Western Capitalist perspective: it is good to be king, as the truism goes, and even better to be the victor at the end of history. What is more remarkable is that in the affirmation of the intrinsic goods and pure ends represented by capitalism in its much-ballyhooed "defeat" of its other, that Manichean frame of mind has also been affirmed, as has the seeming problematization of the definition of the Self de Vries and Weber describe. It is clear enough that the ambivalence of the determination of the self qua determination of the other itself has been raised to a formal principle, celebrated for its own sake in a politics organized not around the support of defensive-preservative violence, but of preemptive and deferred violence. To say the same differently, nothing has substantively changed, or been permitted to change, in the occidental-capitalist thought of violence: it retains and amplifies the very logic of the Cold War (its neo-Manichean and -Hammurabic precepts of equity and economy, as well as its politics of deferral), and moreover retains and amplifies the sanctity of the Self in question, now defensible and determinable by any means necessary, whatever that necessarily means: it is less a matter of absolute ascription of violence to (or as) the other and more of the right to decisively determine the justificatory value of the perpetrated act. In this game of mutually assured determination, the players may have changed, the rules may be stacked to and suspended in favor of one side, but the game itself remains the same.

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[10] de Vries & Weber, Introduction, 1-2.

It is thus that our prevailing definitions of violence continue to regard it not simply as an act, but an act of commission, minimally requiring willful, intentional harm, an actor with agency and intent, a victim upon whom the effects of that act are legible, and an act which simultaneously defines each as such – situating violence, in other words, as *the determinate quality of the relation between self and other*, if not always legible as violence in the restricted, empirical sense. Essentially legal and phenomenological in nature (insofar as intentionality is an operative cornerstone for each), such definitions are bound and inscribed within ocularcentric juridical codes that necessitate both the materiality and legibility of evidence and the presence of the subject-qua-subject-of-law. And in each and every case, these parameters and their operative terms bear upon appeals to transcendental categories of the self and self-same, of justice and the sovereign right to defend that self-same purity, of the essential alterity of violence (and its agents) to the sanctified spheres in which one identifies and makes oneself at home. With this, the fundament for the concept of violence is nominally immanent to the social, but in point of fact always-already placed at a certain distance from the material and political terrain in which the empirical violence any liberal-democratic legal code ostensibly seeks to eliminate takes its effects: what is always in question is the local and immediate (in the sense of the specificity of a particular relation between the one and its other) rather than the global and systemic (in the sense of structures of relations, independent of whatever localized agents and scenarios that give them shape and legibility).

While we will have occasion to more fully interrogate these problematics and processes throughout this chapter, for the moment we might simply note a basic but crucial quality of such a definition that comes to bear equally on how violence is thought as on how it offers itself to be thought: it is in essence *ascriptional*, *relational*, and *deferential*, and as such has both everything and nothing to do with violence "itself." Rather than extending from a consideration of the term, or even an originary concept, of violence "itself," it externalizes its terms, occluding and deferring their interrogation. A reduction occurs here, and more than an empirical limitation or constraint upon the thought of violence in general: this externalizing, ascriptional conceptualization "passes the buck" and shifts the labor of definition and thetic constitution to the outside, to agents and others both localized and generalized, and is bound within overarching and mythic schematics of opposition that, in a deadly parody of ideal social praxis, extend from thought to the lived relation to empirical violence to the acceptance of institutional, systemic, and structural violence as the mere play of social and market forces necessary to maintaining the order of things. Indeed, it is from and perhaps only from this point of reduction, dislocation, and interlocution – as much "intentional" as structural in a leviathanic titrating process – that the violent imaginary can operate and sustain other, more substantive systemic and structural violences that apocryphally fall outside the scope of its operative terms. But what threatens to be most fundamentally lost in this reduction is *the very idea of violence itself* – and even, perhaps, the means to apprehend that idea in the first place. Violence, in such an equation, is not so much an empty referent as an absent presence, and the word itself, when spoken, nothing more than an expansive husk both referred to a radicalized outside (alterity, categorically) and ful/filled by its *own* outside (its imaginary and its multiple apparatuses, the subjects and their others who play out the drama on the stage they set), its meaning and any consideration of it perpetually conferred onto other conceptual grounds, and endlessly, relentlessly deferred.

So what, then, *is* violence?

This much is certain, and not in the least unrelated to the character and mislocutionary force of the violent imaginary: *we can never really talk about violence.* More precisely, we can never do anything *but* talk "about" it, doing an absurd linguistic and conceptual dance around its perimeters, stabbing and feinting at it, bringing it under temporary command that is never fully adequate to the ends of comprehension, and even then always through an intermediary or interlocutor ("class structure," "race relations," "the cinema") that traces and informs the concept as such, but subsequently may defer or deflect our attention from "getting to the matter of things." And indeed even this fundamental difficulty – the inability to speak (of) violence – can only be understood in an unsatisfactory, roundabout way: by claiming that violence is the outside – or better than this, the other – of the ideality of discourse itself.

There is thus always at least a pragmatic sense of futility, of resignation to "violence" whenever one attempts to speak of it outside the realm of inexplicit generalities, sophistic platitudes and facile analogies. But is this a "problem" only to the extent that the difficulties in apprehending the question – and the Sisyphean compulsion to keep coming back to it – speak quite directly to not only the importance, but the *centrality* of violence to life and thought, to all that lies in Derrida's infamous "god, man, and so forth," indeed positioning violence as the "and so forth," as the inaugural force, the indissoluble remainder, the inexhaustible trace? And for this reason, could it not also be said that this avoidance is inevitable, even *necessary* to the projects of criticism and philosophy, which absolutely require violence as an *a priori* concept and condition of possibility – admissible but unutterable – to proceed in the first place? Is it then a matter not of "getting over" or past it, nor of getting under or out from under it, but of going through its strata, from which we can never escape and within which we can never find adequate bearing, finally admitting the debt in which this terrible concept holds us all?

The challenges that the thinking and speaking of violence presents (to say nothing of the challenges of "fixing" the term) have most certainly preoccupied and informed much, if not all, of contemporary Western philosophy and criticism, directly and indirectly, across disciplinary, geographic, and geopolitical borders, and with a notable and increasing urgency coordinate with the rise and axiomatic permutation of industrial-to-late capitalism in the century just past. Following Marx and Engels by way of Nietzsche, Sorel was concerned with the political uses and motivations of violence as related revolutionary class consciousness and class warfare alike, positing voluntaristic means of "direct action" against capitalist production to simultaneously actualize the power of and return power to the proletariat. Following Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, Bataille sought the potentials of violation of exchange in economic and libidinal terms, proposing modes of existence that would constitute a destructive counterattack to an increasingly Taylorized culture of alienating autoproduction. In the years between and after World Wars, the Frankfurt School was implicitly motivated by the multiplicity of violence's forms and functions, from relatively subtle but pervasive manipulations of experience in totalitarian states where systemic and interpersonal barbarism reigns supreme, to more overtly and recognizably "violent" actions, again on the part of these states, in the forms of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and the conceptually coextensive leveling of consumer consciousness and class stratification (the "war of all against all"). The post-Vietnam era we most commonly associate with late capitalism and its multiple crises of legitimation has given many Western scholars, perhaps most notably Slotkin and Clastres, the occasion to reevaluate both the mythic regenerative quality of violence integral to American frontier mythology past and present and the necessary relation between violence and the capitalist state. And in the wake of late capitalism's imperialist processes of global colonization and decolonization, non-Western thinkers such as Fanon, Said, Bhaba, and Spivak have impacted the occidental scene by unequivocally isolating the intrinsic (and in Spivak's terms, epistemic[11]) violence of not simply Western capitalism as it encroaches into new market-territories, but of the entire trajectory of deed and thought that permits and justifies its expansion.

While the breadth of these varied apprehensions is well beyond the scope of the present inquiry to map out in detail, there is a common conceptual thread which runs between them that is useful as a most basic situational definition for violence as a *relational quality*. However articulated and localized, "violence" has with best intent and better reason been implicitly and increasingly explicitly identified in, through, between and across *all* relations of determination in modern times: most generally wherever the quality of these relations are monological, asymmetrical, or unequal, and somewhat more specifically wherever there is inequity and subjugation of one will or body (however conceived) to another, be it in ethnic and racial struggles and conflict, in gender and sexual relations, in class struggle and oppression, and indeed in the very formation and foundations of the Self itself. But to the extent that this last is what is in the first and last instance at stake in every case, that fundamental, originary Manicheanism and all it carries with it pervades and persists in the modes, means, and mandates of conflict, contestation, and opposition which form the basis and political exigency of critical theory across the board. It should be now surprise, then, that "violence" (in whatever form it needs must find) has formed a singular nexus, though often implicitly, for the intervention of critical theory and philosophy, standing as much as their point of entry and necessity as their fundamental limit, their unspoken and unspeakable, even their *aufhebung* and shameful point of no return.

"What is violence," indeed – can the question even *be* asked? Can it *not*?

Again, this question certainly cannot be *answered* here, at least not in full, nor should it. In fact, this question is one that, in order to even begin *to* begin its undertaking with the sensitivity demanded by its seriousness, involves attending a number of additional questions prior but immanent to it, the demands of each evoking even more. Can any reframing of the concept avoid the pitfalls that such an operation would seek to upend or oppose? Can there be a conceptualization, if not even a comprehension, of violence that neither reduces the term to a simple opposition or antithesis of hegemonic discourse (a reactionary and defensive "counter-violence" that can only be substantively understood and operative by the hegemonic terms set by that which is opposed), nor ultimately returns the concept to a set of transcendental or mythic-essentialist grounds that are the very basis for its understanding in the first place (a "pure violence" that comes to rest on notions of an essential "quality" of violence, or of providential justice or utopian praxis situated as an alternate ideality, and as such, in either case, yet another imaginary)?

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[11] See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 280-291.

In sum, are there *any means possible* to think violence – let alone schematize or speak (of) it – that do not reiterate and reinscribe its limitations, discursive and otherwise? Indeed, can violence be considered as a *concept* in the first place – and if so, is there a necessary relation between conceptualization and violence? At the same time, does even this perceived difficulty arise only insofar as it holds as its *a priori* tenet precisely a metaphysical, mytho-transcendental quality of violence, actively if unconsciously placing it before the fact in an impossible and inaccessible tropos outside of all means of linguistic apprehension, historical contingency, and politico-philosophical critique? And ultimately: what is, what can be, our *responsibility* to violence – what duty, even *debt*, do we owe this indescribable "thing," always-already before the fact and before the act of any critique?

If we are to attempt an understanding of violence that is to any degree qualitatively different from that permitted by the violent imaginary, we must first question whether such an understanding can "succeed" in the first place, and if so, what that success might precipitate and entail. Consequently, we must also interrogate the fundamental necessity *for* such an undertaking as something that itself is inherently problematic, taking this impossibility and futility less as obstacles to be overcome, accepted, or endured than as productive aporetics that can and should be acknowledged and, in their own way, embraced.

It is already clear enough, as de Vries and Weber claim with admirable understatement, that "...violence – whether past or present, hidden or manifest, excessive or mitigated – can be said to impose a certain difficulty of articulation."[12] Precisely why this "is" the case can be found at the core of one of Jacques Derrida's great and circuitous treatises on violence,

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[12] de Vries & Weber, Introduction, 13.

"Violence and Metaphysics," which is organized around an exploration of the fundamental conceptual alterity of violence to discourse in Western philosophy, and moreover the coextensive and complexly codependent relation between violence and philosophy that arises from and permits this fundamental alterity in the first place. Retracing the path Derrida takes here would be akin to Borges' folly of tracing a full-scale map of the world, but put simply, what he proposes is that the structure of Western thought – as both critiqued and exemplified for Derrida by his point of interlocution, Levinas – has pervasively situated the thought of violence within larger metaphysical schematics of Manichean absolutes – presence and absence, interiority and exteriority, light and dark, discourse and silence, finite totality and positive infinity, God and Death, self and other – and that in this, violence is simultaneously positioned as *the origin and consequence of all systems of difference and the determination of difference*, including philosophy itself.

As Richard Beardsworth explains, the concept and genealogy of violence Derrida occupies throughout his work is most directly schematized in *Of Grammatology*, where

> three regions of violence are situated and inextricably wound together: first, the originary violence of the system of differences which disappropriates the proper in constituting it; second, the violence of what is commonly conceived as the attempt to put an end to violence – the institution of law – but which is revealed as a violence because of its apparent suppression of the originary difference; and third, the necessary (if empirical) possibility of phenomenal violence *as* the consequence of the inability of law to suppress its 'illegality' in relation to originary difference. The structure makes a mockery of any attempt to arrest the meaning or conceptual coherence of the terms in play. For example, the more ethical the law attempts to be, the more unethical it becomes, the more it resembles that which it is nominally opposed to – phenomenal violence. In this sense the term 'structure' is itself inadequate since the structure is a differential economy of law. (...) The institution of law is necessarily violent as an effect of the 'originary violence' which exposes a being to the world and to others prior to any particular relation (ethical, political, social) which this being then entertains with them. All determined relations presuppose this originary violence ... repeated through the need of the law then instituted to maintain itself constantly *as* the law. (...) The repetition of the law implies at the same time another repetition of the originary violence which has 'always already' accompanied the foundation and guarding of the law – that is, the breaking of it.[13]

Not unlike the violent imaginary, in the tripartite metaphysical schema Derrida outlines violence is both factually and conceptually irreducible: a *singularity* which is both structurally integral to discourse and which, by its irreducibility or singularity within discourse (i.e., as a determined and determinate concept), constitutes a certain *opacity* that problematizes its apprehension and conceptualization across the board, and not least given the *aporetic* quality of violence these latter qualities attempt to mediate and regulate.

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[13] Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, 23-24.

The doggedly singular quality of each of the operative terms here (violence, law, and economy) – and particularly violence, which, in enabling law, creates law and precipitates the economy that balances them, keeping their boundaries distinct – is both the most significant barrier to a materialist critique of violence and something of a boon to those ends. For on the one hand, this quality is precisely the means by which Derrida can speak of "an originary violence" *without* slipping into transcendental categories or appeals: violence is regarded as a condition of possibility that is both the origin and the limit of law, of discourse, of philosophy, and so forth, but an origin and a limit also immanent to these systems and structures, constituted only by their own schematic self-definitions and self-determinations. As Beardsworth explains, the originary violence Derrida describes

> exposes a being to the world and to others prior to any particular relation (ethical, political, social) which this being then entertains with them. All determined relations presuppose this originary violence as the radical impossibility of a proper name. This violence is repeated through the need of the law then instituted to maintain itself constantly *as* the law. That the law must repeat itself reveals its necessary illegality. The repetition of the law implies at the same time another repetition of the originary violence which has 'always-already' accompanied the foundation and guarding of the law – that is, the breaking of it. Whatever the temporal illusion of their chronological succession (the history *of* linguistics, for example) these three 'forms of violence' arise together (hence the inadequacy of the structural description which 'spaces' them out) in the essential inability of an act of legislation to be what Derrida calls *a pure present*."[14]

The *aporetic* structure of violence and the economy of forces and relations it orders is thus one that requires and carries within itself strategies of suspension and deferral that entail not only political, but temporal appeals to transcendence. The law's disavowal of time (e.g., the law's self-posited transcendence of history as such), Beardsworth explains, is coordinate with its disavowal of its own violence and, just as importantly, of its inadequacy in the face of violence (the "act of legislation" that "always arrives too early and/or too late"[15]): "The refusal to recognize the originary violence of the law, the refusal to think the *socius* as necessarily divided before, through and after every act of law," Beardsworth says, "derives from the [law's self-preservative] desire to concentrate time into the present. God is the 'irreplaceable' name of this desire."[16] Consequently, the aporetic quality of this singularity problematizes the relation between the very categories of the universal and the singular, law and judgment, rule and exception in such a way as to require a potentially deadly passage through transcendental categories that constitute a condition of impossibility for meaningfully speaking (of) violence. And insofar as within this aporetic relation violence both evades and must be made subject to a determinate conceptualization, these implications are themselves as thoroughly, inexorably, and inescapably political as they are ethical.

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[14] Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, 24.

[15] Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, 100.

These aporetic qualities and the strategies of "overcoming" their implications in politics, images, and philosophy will concern us presently. At this point, we might only emphasize how Derrida, in a characteristic double-gesture, positions violence as *both* fundamental to law, discourse, and philosophy *and* their absolute other, their "opponent" or "adversary" that, within their movements and driven by political and ethical imperatives, must be banished, but at the same time, in the same movement, and by the same imperatives must also be preserved – for within violence is also the heart, the soul, the mind, the very purpose and possibility of philosophy and thought, of writing and speech, of politics and responsibility. "For this transcendental origin," Derrida says,

> as the irreducible violence of the relation to the other, is at the same time nonviolence, since it opens the relation to the other. It is an *economy*. And it is this economy which, by this opening, will permit access to the other to be determined, in ethical freedom, as moral violence or nonviolence.[17]

This *economy of violence* – "keeping it in circulation," so to speak, and "in balance" – is what both mitigates and preserves not only violence but each and all of the varied systems of knowledge and power that it informs, which, by Derrida's terms, is to say *all* such systems.

In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida interrogates this "general economy of violence" along parallel tracks: one explicit in his critique of Western metaphysics' necessary participation in that economy (by way of tarrying with Emmanuel Levinas' conceptualization of that economy as such), and one somewhat more implicit and allusive, a constellational critique that refracts the more literal preeminence of "economics" in the modalities of exchange given rise and role in post-Enlightenment epistemology. In the simplest terms, the economy of violence Derrida speaks of is the Manichean balance and balancing of equations in a structure of deferral that cannot account for its own organizing principles or conditions of possibility: essentially, a holistic imaginary. Insofar as violence is integral to and not outside of the economy, it cannot, as is the ideality of the ends of law and discourse, be "taken out of circulation" altogether: it must be conserved as a point of contestation, and enables all contestations to proliferate. In a way that is both contrary to the calls for and measures toward its elimination in the social sphere and of a piece with its necessity to the very constitution and stability of that sphere, violence must not only be retained and preserved, but itself grow, expand, mutate and sublimate, positing a correlation between an economy *of* violence and economy *as* violence.

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[16] Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, 101. Brackets mine.

[17] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 128-129.

Ultimately, making a distinction between violence and the systems (particularly law and philosophy) that in their own ways nominally oppose it is an exercise in the impossible – folly at best, bad faith at worst – but this impossibility is also what both constitutes the ethical necessity to keep returning *to* the question and guarantees the perpetuity *of* the question. The extent to which this is the case is perhaps best illustrated in the following passage from "Violence and Metaphysics," which implicates the titular terms in an economy of deferral, complicity, and contradiction which organizes the totality of discursive and political relations, and which, as it were, "speaks for itself":

> If, as Levinas says, only discourse (and not intuitive contact) is righteous, and if, moreover, all discourse essentially retains within it space and the Same – does this not mean that discourse is originally violent? And that the philosophical logos, the only one in which peace may be declared, is inhabited by war? The distinction between discourse and violence always will be an inaccessible horizon. Nonviolence would be the telos, and not the essence of discourse. Perhaps it will be said that something like discourse has its essence in telos, and the presence of its present in its future. This certainly is so, but on the condition that its future and its telos be nondiscourse: peace as a *certain* silence, a certain beyond of speech, a certain possibility, a certain silent horizon of speech. And telos has always had the form of presence, be it a future presence. There is war only after the opening of discourse, and war dies out only at the end of discourse. Peace, like silence, is the strange vocation of a language called outside itself by itself. But since *finite* silence is also the medium of violence, language can only indefinitely tend toward justice by acknowledging and practicing the violence within it. Violence against violence. *Economy* of violence. An economy irreducible to what Levinas envisions in the world. If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse. This *vigilance* is a violence chosen as the least violence by a philosophy which takes history, that is finitude, seriously; a philosophy aware of itself as *historical* in each of its aspects (in a sense which tolerates neither finite

> totality, nor positive infinity), and aware of itself … as Levinas says in another sense, as *economy*. But again, an economy which in being history, can be *at home* neither in the finite totality which Levinas calls the Same nor in the positive presence of the Infinite. Speech is doubtless the first defeat of violence, but paradoxically, violence did not exist before this possibility of speech. The philosopher (man) *must* speak and write within the war of light, a war in which he always finds himself engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying discourse, that is, by risking the worst violence. This is why the avowal of this war within discourse, an avowal which is not yet peace, signifies the opposite of bellicosity; the bellicosity – and who has shown this better than Hegel? – whose best accomplice *within history* is irenics. *Within history* which the philosopher cannot escape, because it is not history in the sense given to it by Levinas (totality), but is the history of departures from totality, history as the very movement of transcendence, of the excess over the totality without which no totality would appear as such. History is not the totality transcended by eschatology, metaphysics, or speech. It is transcendence itself. If speech is a movement of metaphysical transcendence, it is history, and not beyond history. It is difficult to think the origin of history in a perfectly finite totality (the Same), as well as, moreover, in a perfectly positive infinity. If, in this sense, the movement of metaphysical transcendence is history, it is still violent, for – and this is the legitimate truism from which Levinas always draws inspiration – history is violence. Metaphysics is *economy:* violence against violence, light against light: philosophy (in general). About which it can be said, by transposing Claudel's intention, that everything in it 'is painted on light as if with condensed light, like the air which *becomes* frost.' This becoming is war. This polemic is language itself. Its inscription.[18]

What Derrida minimally suggests here is that the difficulty in thinking or articulating violence, as well as the opacity to understanding and access violence categorically presents, has as much to do with the general insufficiency of language (qua discourse) and its alterity to violence (qua the silencing of discourse) as it has to do with violence being the very condition of possibility for, and hence the fundamental limit of, discourse itself. Consequently, every discursive instance (like every act of law) reinscribes, repeats, reextends, and reenacts this violence, while at the same time reforming anew the economy from which it arises and in which it is at home.

Philosophically and politically speaking, an indissoluble, schizophrenic tension emerges, the Hellerian "Catch-22": should violence (as the antithesis or silencing of discourse) triumph, absolutely, philosophy would have neither means nor purpose, ontologically (as an essential condition of possibility) or politically (as a condition of necessity, a tangible point or objectile target against which to contend); should violence be dispensed, absolutely – and this dispensation as much in the register of material or political reality as in more virtualized conceptual or discursive planes – so too would the need for philosophy (at least "as we know it"). The most deleterious consequence of this double-bind is that violence is made to be as much the other of philosophical thought and critical inquiry as it is in the enterprises of distance, displacement, and false consciousness that any political philosophy seeks to attend or attack for the very same reasons, and is ultimately conserved by precisely the same logos. Violence, in other words, is the abject scotoma that both philosophy and its objects of contemplation (itself included) cannot *but* ignore. It is thus that even when speaking of violence – or at least when attempting to speak of it, while in fact speaking "about" it – we are always-already in its debt, and subject to its terms.

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[18] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 116-117.

Given the indeterminacies and opacities both that violence presents to thought and that the thought of violence presents, and moreover given the central role violence has persistently occupied, as the inaugural force and compulsory point of return, for so much of contemporary critical thought, it is perhaps of no great surprise that, in his other great treatise on violence, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," Derrida opens by speaking at length about aporias, those contradictions that arise within and confront thought which cannot – and crucially, for Derrida, *should* not – be overcome. For it is from these aporias that thought, that philosophy itself, arises: they are the condition of possibility for the entire enterprise, the stubbornly indiscernible point to which all thought worthy of its cause returns exhausted, inexorably and repetitively.

In this address, Derrida claims that there is "only one aporia, only one potential aporetic that infinitely distributes itself"[19]: the aporetic relation between law and violence which instates, extends, and determines each. This aporia engenders all others – the differential distinctions that constitute force, justice, right, and ultimately self and other – and is the root both of the transcendental qualities of law, authority, justice, and violence "as we know them" and of the infinite problems they present by their mystical opacity:

> (T)hese problems are not infinite simply because they are infinitely numerous, not because they are rooted in the infinity of memories and cultures (religious, philosophical, juridicial, and so forth) that we shall never master. They are infinite, if we may say so, in themselves, because they require the very experience of the aporia that is not unrelated to … the "mystical."[20]

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[19] Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," 22.

[20] Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," 16.

At this point, the problem of the conceptual singularity of "violence" – its *irreducible centrality to all relations* in thought and deed – again comes to the fore. Both owing to and of a piece with the aporetic opacity violence presents to thought, this singularity is not necessarily one of constitutive totality or unity (i.e., violence as a determinate or self-same concept), but rather one arising from a coeval failure and overcompensation of nominalism, a linguistic and conceptual insufficiency in light of the multiple opacities at stake (the opacity of "violence itself," the opacity of the barrier between violence and its thought, the opacity between thought and its expression/articulation, and so forth); in other words, when there are no words, one will do (to wit: god).

Indeed, Derrida's own considerations in his reading of Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" and its operative, aporetic keystone, *Gewalt* – simultaneously meaning violence and force, but also sovereign power, authority, and law – prove both instructive and symptomatic. For all his self-reflexive and self-deconstructive contortions, Derrida cannot escape either singular terms or the terms of the singular (if, again, not necessarily the unified or the total). In his attempts to problematize the aporetic notions of violence that organize Benjamin's germinal text, he ultimately too concedes the point – and "for the sake of convenience,"[21] no less! – that in his address *Gewalt* be recognized only and solely as violence *qua violence*. Even the title of his address is singular in every regard: *one* force, *one* law, and *one* abiding relation – an ascriptional, proprietary, utilitarian, and instrumental relation – between the two. Certainly, that law and violence *may* be conflated and reduced to these singular terms is both Derrida's point and interventionary gesture here, and made more pungent by the fact that this is a problem not just of language, but of the English language, the language with which Derrida cannily chooses to address his audience: a language "rich with the alluvia of its history"[22] with implied implications for the thought of violence in our contemporary geopolitical reality under the US-centric hegemony of economic and spectacular arrangements.[23]

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[21] Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," 31.

[22] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 82.

[23] Much could be said of Derrida's gesture here (indeed, he says much about it himself) as one toward justice, for "to address oneself to the other in the language of the other," Derrida says, "is, it seems, the condition of all possible justice." ("Force of Law," 17) Two brief notes here will hopefully suffice. The first is that Derrida demonstrates in this statement both the pure possibility of justice (inasmuch as addressing the other in the language of the other is a gesture of respect and regard for, of responsibility to, the other without violence) and

But at the same time, in terms of the linguistic and conceptual insufficiency just noted, this "untranslatable moment" is particularly notable, and symptomatic, of precisely what Derrida both speaks and cannot (not) speak. Whether it be inevitably or intentionally (in the end, it hardly matters which), in dancing around the point, around the very term itself, and in settling into an examination the peripheral (if no less real and urgent) implications that surround the thought surrounding violence, Derrida, in the spirit of Benjamin, both reveals and demonstrates the fundamental folly of apprehending violence as a concept in the first place.[24] The danger here is twofold: first, in the hubris that such a Gordian knot *can* be cut, and second in the notion that it *should*. The tradeoff, such as it is, requires that the concept (if not necessarily its material extensions and consequences) be preserved so that what thought and political potentials it holds and enables might likewise be preserved. One conservation leading to another, *ad infinitum*: this is at the heart of the metaphysical "economy of violence," of which Derrida speaks but cannot but maintain, less as a conservationist than in his unwillingness to lie before the fact that in this general economy of violence, violence is the trace that cannot but be preserved.

Still, and however much this reeks of the tainting empiricism and phenomenological bracketings which Derrida would work to resist, we must begin with *some* kind of premise of what violence "is" in order to proceed (both in the present inquiry and, indeed, any inquiry that ultimately comes to bear on matters of force and politics) – in other words, a *situation* of the concept *as such*, to avoid as much as possible that ultimate act of bad faith noted by Williams: "doing violence to violence" by way of willful definitional avoidance. For this much, to the degree that anything can be certain, is certain: if we are to conceptualize

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the impossibility of pure justice (inasmuch as speaking to the other requires an appropriation of that language, and moreover an address, that are of their own violence). The second is what one can recognize as a damning allusion to precisely the Manichean precepts that proprietarily attribute violence to the other: if the language of the other is understood *as* violence, then the only logical means of communication with the other can be violence – and this as a mode of justice itself.

[24] On the one hand, Derrida says, "The concept of violence (*Gewalt*) permits an evaluative concept only in the sphere of law and justice (*Recht*, *Gerechtigkeit*) or the sphere of moral relations (*sittliche Verhältnisse*). There is no natural or physical violence. We can speak figuratively of violence with regard to an earthquake or even to a physical ailment. But we know that these aren't cases of a *Gewalt* able to give rise to a judgment, before some instrument of justice. The concept of violence belongs to the symbolic order of law, politics, and morals. And it is only to this extent that it can give rise to critique." (31) But on the other hand, bound as this concept is within questions of the jurisprudential relation between means and ends, "the criteriology … then concern(s) only the application of violence, not violence itself." (31)

violence – much less posit violence as "a concept" – it must be in such a way as to bear in mind, and always remind, that it is precisely such a production, borne of conditions of possibility afforded by the time and tools at hand, with all of their limitations and potentialities. So in the spirit of Derrida, and in ways that come equally and specifically to bear on Gilles Deleuze's notion of the concept, this situation *must* be one that initially takes violence as neither objectivized *problem* nor nominalized *fact*, but instead as *a material and conceptual inevitability arising from the immanent conditions and relations of a time.*[25]

And hence a conundrum, if not an impasse, for a meaningful critique of violence in late capitalism. Because violence can and must be understood only by the means of revelation and effacement afforded by the specific conditions and exigencies of a time, this means that today, paradoxically enough, violence can best if not only be understood and situated *within* the discursive structures, power relations, and modes of existence afforded and allowed by the spectacle, the signatory of late capitalism. While we must never lose sight of the reality of violence in all the forms it may take, the reality of our *understanding* of violence – and not only how, but that this understanding is always subject to revision – is of equal import because, simply, under the force of the spectacle these realities are one and the same thing. Surely, this to no small degree entails an affirmation of the spectacle and the violent imaginary, a certain surrender to the terms by which they frame violence as an exclusively phenomenal, empirical, and visible matter, and moreover a violent nominalization in positioning violence as a concept in the first place. So from the Derridean perspective, which regards concepts as products of a discourse that is bound to its own broken language and is thus always incomplete and in error of its object (and perhaps never moreso than when confronting violence), we might be in error to call violence a "concept" at all, and do the worst violence in treating as one. From a Deleuzian perspective, however, the quality of "violence" both as a complex singularity and as the disruptive practice of philosophy itself (as a machine that produces concepts that are unamenable to reification and commodity exchange, "products" which the dominant economy has no use for, cannot account for, and hence that might destroy it), lead us to understand that violence might be

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[25] A brief note of clarification: as Derrida indicates in this chapter's opening epigraph, irreducible factuality is always-already transcendental and mystical; I take this to be qualitatively and categorically different from an inevitability, which is rather the produced outcome of determinate historical processes and relations. This, of course, is the quality of all facts, but is to say again that what is at stake here is less a question of essence than of a mode of articulation and a frame of apprehension (or, more precisely, of *regard*).

"properly" positioned not only as a concept, but also (and certainly in a way that is compatible with Derrida's theses) as the condition of possibility for the very production of concepts at all.

To ask (if only that) whether this autogenetic, autoreferential, and arguably ipseic situation takes violence too far into the metaphysical wormholes that Derrida contests is at once crucial to the spirit of his discourse (positing violence as both a point of impassable *différance* and an autotelic aporia, hence endowed with a certain mystical transcendentalization before the fact) and cuts to the heart of the ethical vigilance required in the face of violence. For as Derrida says in "Violence and Metaphysics" (if with a damning gesture which places phenomenology on the side of the spectacle),

> (n)o philosophy responsible for its language can renounce ipseity in general, and the philosophy or eschatology of separation may do so less than any other. Between original tragedy and messianic triumph there is *philosophy*, in which violence is returned against violence within knowledge, in which original finitude appears, and in which the other is respected within, and by, the same. This finitude makes its appearance in an irreducibly open question which is *the philosophical question in general: why* is the essential, irreducible, absolutely general and unconditioned form of experience as a venturing forth toward the other still egoity? *Why* is an experience which would not be lived as *my own* (for an ego in general, in the eidetic-transcendental sense of these words) impossible and unthinkable? This unthinkable and impossible are the limits of reason in general. In other words: *why finitude*, if as Schelling had said, 'egoity is the general principle of finitude'? And *why Reason*, if it is true that 'Reason and Egoity, in their true Absoluteness, are one and the same' (Schelling), and true that 'reason … is a kind of universal and essential structure of transcendental subjectivity in general' (Husserl)? The philosophy which is the discourse of this reason as phenomenology cannot answer such a question by essence, for every answer can be made only in language, and language is opened by the question. Philosophy (in general) can only open itself to the question, within it and by it. It can only *let itself be questioned*.[26]

As a first step to the always-incomplete end of a vigilantly non-essentialist and heuristic mode of regarding violence, I would like to make four general methodological propositions. First and most simply, the greatest danger in attempting to conceptualize violence is *not* to be found in the inevitable degrees of overgeneralization or overspecification to which it is always subject, however much these do an unavoidable violence to the idea, thought, or concept of violence. Rather, the greatest danger is in positing any absolute or definitive concept of violence: if a concept it must be, it must remain fluid, provisional, heterogeneous, open, even improvised.[27] The conceptual singularity of violence – the tendency of the concept itself toward absolute categories – certainly complicates matters here, as does its absolute (and ethically deserved) gravitas: in short and to state the obvious, the thought of violence invites hyperbolization and extremity equal to its empirical forms. Yet we might understand the singularity violence entails in its conceptualization as much in the imaginary sense of an opaque, monolithic, and totalized universality (that is, the metacategorical entity of violence that subsumes its subsequent particularizations of acts, agents, and so forth) as in the Deleuzian sense of the single/multiple by which he understands the singularity of philosophical concepts (which, to be sure, violence "is" as much as anything): "There are no universals, only singularities," he says; "(c)oncepts aren't universals but sets of singularities that each extend into the neighborhood of one of the other singularities."[28] In this way, a concept of violence may emerge that is not a *certain* concept in the determinate or factic-mystified sense, but rather one that opens up upon specific modes of existence in *certain encounters with other concepts and planes of immanence.*

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[26] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 131.

With this, our second methodological proposition: to guard against those transcendental appeals which are so often part and parcel with the absolutism marking the thought of violence, and which tendentially distance even the most well-intended political critiques of violence from the matter of things they attempt to address. Appeals to a notion of "pure violence" (be it in the form of Benjaminian "divine violence" or Bataille's "capital-V" Violence as the exteriority of and weapon to be wielded against "capital-R" Reason)[29] are of limited value, because they inevitably slip back into the solipsistic modes of egoism and ipseity from which they arise, opening up on transcendental or otherwise absolutely alterior tropologies, inhabiting a messianic space of deferral and absolute judgment, answering to the question "what is violence?" with a description and enactment of another, equally mytho-transcendent form of violence, at base replicating the logic of the violent imaginary and putting even greater degrees of distance between the concept and its immanent domain.

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[27] This is not to say "purely reinvented," however, with neither regard nor debt to extant preconditions. As Derrida puts it in an unpublished 1982 interview (narrated in the documentary bearing his name), "It's not easy to improvise. It's the most difficult thing to do. Even when one improvises in front of a camera or a microphone, one ventriloquizes, or leaves another to speak in one's place, the schemas and languages that are already there. There are already a great number of prescriptions that are prescribed in our memory and in our culture. All the names are already preprogrammed. It's already the names that inhibit our ability to ever really improvise. One can't say whatever one wants. One is obliged more or less to reproduce the stereotypical discourse. And so I believe in improvisation, and I fight for improvisation, but always with the belief that it's impossible. And there where there is improvisation, I am not able to see myself. I am blind to myself, and it is what I will see – no I won't see it, it's for others to see – the one who is improvised here – no, I won't ever see him."

[28] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 146.

[29] Similarly, Derrida notes, "*We do not say pure nonviolence.* Like pure violence, pure nonviolence is a contradictory concept. Contradictory beyond what Levinas calls 'formal logic.' Pure violence, a relationship between things without face, is not yet violence, is pure nonviolence. And inversely: pure nonviolence, the nonrelation of the same to the other (in the sense understood by Levinas) is pure violence. Only a face can arrest violence, but can do so, in the first place, only because a face can provoke it. Levinas says it well: 'Violence can only aim at the

Yet neither is this task a matter of starkly opposing what could be called an immanentist conceptualization of violence against those of transcendent or ideological/imaginary lineage. Simply, the "good concept"/"bad concept" paradigm sinks back into all of the Manichean precepts that inform and permit the principles of opposition and definition constituting both the dominant understanding of violence and the aporetics to which it gives rise: that we must resist this oppositional impulse toward unqualified rejection is the third methodological proposition. Insofar as from the Deleuzian perspective there are no "right" or "wrong" concepts – only constructs that are permitted by specific arrangements of enabling conditions – the point here is not to either justify or denounce these fundamental (if not "originary") relations between violence and the visible, but rather to take this limitation as a productive point of entry: like all imaginaries, those with transcendental appeals or postures must be understood as themselves immanent to specific structures and exigent demands, and by this certainly not to be discounted. Indeed, even the transcendental appeals and traces that mark any particular theory or concept of violence – and they are perhaps unavoidable as a whole – likewise should not be hastily dismissed and abandoned in the pursuit of an immanentist conceptualization of violence: rather, we might take to heart Deleuze and Guattari's conviction that "(e)ven illusions of transcendence are useful to us and provide vital anecdotes – for when we take pride in encountering the transcendent within immanence, all we do is recharge the plane of immanence itself..."[30] If the thought of anything – indeed, philosophy – must rest upon the tertiary elements that

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face' ('La violence ne peut viser qu'un visage' *TI*). Further, without the thought of Being which opens the face, there would be only pure violence or pure nonviolence. Therefore, the thought of Being, in its unveiling, is never foreign to a certain violence. That this thought always appears in difference, and that the same – thought (and) (of) Being – is never the identical, means first that Being is history, that Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence, and originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear. A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurrence, nonphenomenality." (*Writing and Difference*, 146-147)

[30] Deleuze & Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 73.

determine the relation between thought and its object in the specific moment of the former's intervention, it is not nearly enough to valuatively dismiss these concepts and the planes of thought from which they are produced as inherently poor or incomplete (as this too presupposes the existence and occupation of an alterior or external plane of judgment, which once again raises and subsumes the immanent into the transcendent). The use-value of these "illusions" for a critique of violence is that, despite their appeals and effects to the contrary, *they themselves no less than purely immanent to thought*, and their translation into social practices and attitudes is nothing if not a material problematic.

Finally (and as these propositions go, most importantly), and not least because violence in many of its possible senses and conceptualizations finds its most devastating forms and functions in absolutely material registers, on and through absolutely real subjects, to reject or dismiss *a priori* any empirical/phenomenological or existential/experiential qualities from a conceptualization of violence would be to throw out the very real baby with the metaphysical bathwater, and would be ultimately both conceptually and ethically suspect. Certainly, limiting the scope of inquiry to the empirical or phenomenological field alone is every bit as dangerous as to the "purely conceptual." But at the same time, this much is also certain: violence of the sort that makes or is permitted to make its presence known and felt, in its mechanics and (even in the absence of this) in its effects, is quite real. It is not, despite whatever theoretical or imaginary-ideological contortions we seek to interrogate or circumvent, a purely theoretical or imaginary problem. But to qualify this admonition, inasmuch as imaginaries and ideology (and, for thinkers such as Deleuze, Lyotard, and Balibar, an undue philosophical focus on imaginaries and ideology as such, a problematic concern we'll return to in a later chapter) displace and distract thought from real issues of production, material or otherwise (and this is precisely what the violent imaginary distracts from as well, which is why we must remain vigilant), the qualities of distraction and displacement that are the bedrock of imaginary relations, in their naked and determined determination of that which must and must not be brought to sight, are also precisely what may give us insight into their character as *productive forces*, not simply obfuscating or reproductive.

Taken together, these propositions come to bear on what Daniel W. Smith calls an "ethics of immanence": the demand and drive, if sometimes subterranean or obfuscated by the metaphorical or methodological abstractions at the heart of much of contemporary theory and philosophy, toward a stripping away of those turns to transcendence that put such thought and theories, before the fact, at an interminable and unabidable distance from the conditions they must needs attend. Without succumbing to an easy conflation of the relations and play of forces with violence itself (a distinction we'll explore later), or likewise putting violence at a "determinate distance" as an amorphously organizing power (another problematic to be deferred for the moment), we might at this point recognize violence as a key *determinant* of existence. But in so doing, and in following our injunction to resist the forces of unqualified approbation or condemnation and to approach these matters in the positive mode of a heuristic endeavor, we must attend this determination not as the violation (or even liberation) of a pure or presubjective Being, but rather as central to the production of what Deleuze calls a *mode of existence*. As Smith explains,

> (a) mode of existence can be evaluated, apart from transcendental or universal values, by the purely immanent criteria of *power* or capacity (*puissance*), that is, by the manner in which it deploys its power by going to the limit of what it can do (or, on the contrary, by the manner in which it is cut off from its power to act and is reduced to impotence). (...) Modes of existence, in other words, must be evaluated according to the purely *intensive* criteria of power or, more precisely, by the manner by which they are able to possess or intensify their power.[31]

Because (in Smith's admirably unequivocal and agnostic terms) "transcendence expresses our slavery and impotence at its lowest point,"[32] it is of no small consequence that the appeals to the value and (in the case of law) primary justification for the use of violence repeatedly fall under moral rubrics and transcendental appeals to a "suprasensible world" which, as Deleuze finds in Nietzsche and Kant's critiques of justice, ultimately place consciousness at the "receiving end" in the realm of infinitely-deferred but omnipresent judgment, the "debtor-creditor relation ... that lies at the origin of the ethico-moral realm."[33] This subjection to the moral/transcendental appeals which found the law and its omnipresent panoptic power to regulate thought and consciousness – all the more potent and manifest in the spectacular society to which we are equally indebted, and perhaps especially when enfolding the very violence to which thought itself is infinitely mortgaged – holds as its first abiding principle the fundamental quality of limiting the power or capacity to act, reducing it to indentured servitude and conscripture in perpetuity.

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[31] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 253. Smith's primary referent here is Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 74: "There is not the slightest reason for thinking that modes of existence need transcendent values by which they could be compared, selected, and judged relative to one another. There are only immanent criteria. A possibility of life is evaluated through itself in the movements it lays out and the intensities it creates on a plane of immanence: what is not laid out or created is rejected. A mode of existence is good or bad, noble or vulgar, complete or empty, independently of Good or Evil, or any transcendent value: there are never any criteria other than the tenor of existence, the intensification of life." (cited in Smith, 268 n.49)

[32] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 263.

[33] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 257.

Smith thus proposes that the first feature of an immanent ethics is to abandon all transcendental appeals and transcendentalizing gestures (again, to the extent that this is possible), and especially regarding the two forces at stake in the determination of a given mode of existence: the subject and the state. In terms of the former, Smith explains, such an ethics

> replaces the notion of the transcendental subject with immanent modes of existence that are determined by their degrees of power and relations of affectivity. In his later works, Foucault suggested replacing the term "subject" with the term "subjectivation." Just as there is no "pure" Reason or rationality par excellence, he argued, but a plurality of heterogeneous *processes of rationalization* ... so there is no universal or transcendental value that could function as a basis for a universal ethics, but only variable and extraordinarily diverse *processes of subjectivation.* The first positive ethical task would be to analyze the processes of subjectivation (passive syntheses) by which modes of existence are determined ... that could be said to have been summarily codified in the formulas, "Know yourself!" (Greek), "Master yourself!" (Roman), and "Deny yourself!" (Christian).[34]

In terms of the latter, Smith continues,

> (t)his task is inevitably tied to the analysis of social formations, or what Deleuze terms an "assemblage" (*agencement*), and Foucault, an "apparatus" (*dispositif*). Ethics is necessarily linked to political economy. But political philosophy is not necessarily tied to the political form of the state. The state and reason were in this way made to enter into a curious exchange: realized reason was identified with the de jure state, and the state was identified as the becoming of reason. (...) The state is one social type among others, with its own history, its own complex relations with other social formations, and its own processes of capture, unification, and totalization. Modes of

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[34] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 260. As Deleuze notes more explicitly, "A process of subjectivation, that is, a production of a mode of existence, cannot be confused with a subject, unless it is to dismiss the latter from all interiority and even from all identity. Subjectivation does not even have anything to do with the 'person': it is an individuation, individual or collective, that characterizes an event (an hour of the day, a river, a wind, a life...). It is an intensive mode and not a personal subject." (From "*La vie comme oeuvre d'art*," as cited in Kaufman, "Madness and Repetition," 235. This passage appears in a slightly different translation, replacing "mode of existence" with the perhaps less-precise rendering "way of existing," in *Negotiations*, 98-99.) We will return to the explicit question of subjectivation as a violence inherent to the production of a mode of existence in a later section of this chapter.

> existence, as degrees of power, are determined by their affects, that is, by the lines of synthesis of the concrete social assemblage in which they exist.[35]

The second task of such an ethics is to attend not only the power of thought to determine or delimit conceptual production, but also the way in which this power informs, derives from, and opens upon potentialities either offered or denied in a specific social formation and its organizing political and philosophical economy. As he says,

> (w)hat an ethics of immanence will criticize, then, is not simply modes of thought derived from base modes of existence but anything that *separates* a mode of existence from its power of acting. This is the second positive task of an immanent ethics."[36]

Finally, Smith suggests that an immanent ethics' third positive task, deriving from the previous and answering to the challenges they pose, is to ask, "(h)ow are modes of existence capable of being created actively rather than merely being determined passively?"[37] To ask such a question is to plunge headlong into the exigencies of the present in such a way that neither disengages from the power of myth nor is beholden to it, to appreciate the heterogeneity of the codes that both determine and may destabilize it: in short, to *improvise*, to *become* (a mode of existence, one might say, of both tactical and strategic movement, of subversion, of terrorism, of violence, isolating forms of resistance enabled by structures of determination, not simply reacting against them). It is, in sum, a task of working *through*, with a conscientious commitment to interrogate and recognize those points of working *with*. As Smith concludes,

> (t)hese three questions concerning the determination, evaluation, and creation of modes of existence serve to demarcate the problematics and tasks of a purely immanent ethics. In rejecting the idea of a transcendental subject, it seeks to define the immanent processes of subjectivation that determine variable modes of existence. In refusing all forms of transcendence, it evaluates the differences between these modes of existence on the basis of a purely immanent criteria of power. Finally, in rejecting universals, it analyzes the present in terms of the conditions it presents for the production of the singular, that is, for the creation of new modes of existence.[38]

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[35] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 260-261. In a footnote here, Smith elaborates that "(m)odern thought thus found itself subordinated to an image of thought derived from the legislative and juridicial organization of the state, leading to the prevalence, in political philosophy, of such categories as the "republic" of free spirits, the "tribunal" of reason, the "rights" of man, the consensual "contract," "inquiries" into the understanding (method, recognition, question and response, judgement), and so on. On these themes, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 374-80." (268 n.40)

[36] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 263.

[37] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 263.

[38] Smith, "The Place of Ethics in Deleuze's Philosophy," 265.

To be sure, we have already recognized such an ethical injunction in Derrida's interventions, a call to arms to aggressively think and continually rethink violence and its general economy differently, indeed to think the very foundations of this economy differently, as one in which we are always-already complicit and engaged, rallying with even as we rail against: "One always inhabits," Derrida says, "and all the more when one does not suspect it,"[39] and this is the responsibility to violence, the due debt that must be acknowledged without illusions of being overcome. But even responsibility is a double-edged sword: if, as Judith Butler so compellingly claims, "conscience doth make subjects of us all," and if we can somehow evade those dominant discursive understandings of violence that bar our access to its consideration, in this responsibility to violence – this simultaneous being-able and being-compelled to answer to the address of violence, its interpellative force and presence – we return, perhaps syllogistically (though given the singularity of the concept, not necessarily wrongly), to the notion that we are always and again precisely where Levinas and Derrida place us: in a field organized by and suffused with violences that are at once everywhere and, as a consequence, almost nowhere *to be seen.*

Yet for all the opacities, aporetics, and singularities bound in and arising from this "terrible concept," the ethical and political mandates at stake, at least, are clear: the greatest violence is in situating and grounding violence exclusively in the thought of transcendence rather than immanence, in metaphysics at the expense of physics, in myth through the spectacular liquidation of history – however problematic all of these ill-fitting containers always also prove to be vis-à-vis the "object" at stake. Such externalizing and distancing maneuvers, impossible as they may be to fully circumvent, do not simply nullify any potential for substantive access or intervention into the more deleterious conceptualizations of violence, perpetually reinscribing a fundamental *méconnaissance* of the very idea of violence as object, as external, as other: they also, in and by the conditions of our present time, fundamentally reinscribe the power, procedures, and procession of separation that is the characteristic operational modality of the spectacle and the violent imaginary.

It is important to regard violence, then, not as a concept in a singular or mystical/transcendental sense, as such a maneuver would not only do violence to the productive capacities of its aporetic character by way of reification or mythologization, it would also risk running roughshod over the more dangerous dehistoricized utopianisms that prevent meaningful philosophical and political interventions from occurring in the first place, their own strategies, tactics, and potential effects, however well-intended and in their own way essential in the forever-incomplete project of "speaking of violence," countered and nullified before the fact. Nor should violence, however, be regarded in purely relativistic and phenomenological terms, as a slippery sphere of contingency definable or recognizable only by this or that specific degree of difference, disruption, or imbalance in localized instances apparent to consciousness or vision: this type of maneuver relegates violence to the tactical sphere, discounting an understanding of the term as it appears and functions in more sustained, embedded, and continuous modalities. What is absolutely imperative, in the end, is to guard against replacing one imaginary with another (or worse, "its other") that would itself stand for truth: indeed, and perhaps especially when regarding violence, imaginaries are all we have to work through, as Benjaminian images of thought or Deleuzian conceptual schema folding and unfolding in planes of thought.

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[39] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 24.

In fact, it is perhaps *because* violence eludes discourse, eludes conceptualization in thought, eludes language itself, that is has so easily and readily given way, inexorably and inevitably, to a sufficiently instrumentalized imaginary. It is no mere accident that this aporia and its opacities are most at home in the register of the imaginary, in the domain of the image, through which the processes of subjectivation which are the most fundamental limit upon (and violence against) our contemporary mode of existence are most active, most *in*visible, and most potent. We will return to those matters of force and politics presently; now, we might turn first to questions of the visible, the imaginary, and the image in relation to our era's operative concept of violence. For the visible register is the domain in which the very term itself is grounded, a plane that needs to be inhabited to truly begin to understand the many images and the totalizing imaginary that surround and inform this terrible "concept."

vīs:
“THE ELEMENT(S) OF VIOLENCE” (AND ITS IMAGINARY)

I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.[40]

Michel Foucault
“Truth and Power”

War ... is congenital to phenomenality, is the very emergence of speech and appearing.[41]

Jacques Derrida
“Violence and Metaphysics”

The conclusion we can draw is that each historical formation sees and reveals all it can within the conditions laid down for visibility, just as it says all it can within the conditions relating to statements. Nothing is ever secret, even though nothing is ever immediately visible or directly readable. And in both cases the conditions do not meet deep within a consciousness or a subject, any more than they compose a single Entity: they are two forms of exteriority within which dispersion and dissemination take place, sometimes of statements, sometimes of visibilities. (...) Statements are dispersed in accordance with their threshold and family. This applies equally to light, which contains objects, but not visibilities.[42]

Gilles Deleuze
Foucault

What is most clearly and, against the conditions of our relentlessly visual episteme, crucially pronounced in Derrida's critique of violence is his attack on the phenomenological and irreducibly ocularcentric character of its apprehension: how the concept is framed within, formed from, and bound to entrenched schemas of visibility and its correspondence to consciousness which underlie the totality of Western metaphysics “past” and “present,” and how by these terms a “war of light” is constituted. To review that earlier extended passage in condensed form, Derrida says that

> (i)f light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse. This *vigilance* is a violence chosen as the least violence by a philosophy which takes history, that is finitude, seriously; a philosophy aware of itself as *historical* in each of its aspects (in a sense which tolerates neither finite totality, nor positive infinity), and aware of itself ... as *economy*. (...) The philosopher (man) *must* speak and write within the war of light, a war in which he always finds himself engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying discourse, that is, by risking the worst violence. This is why the avowal of this war within

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[40] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 114.
[41] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 129.
[42] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 59-60.

> discourse, an avowal which is not yet peace, signifies the opposite of bellicosity; the bellicosity ... whose best accomplice *within history* is irenics. (...) Metaphysics is *economy*: violence against violence, light against light: philosophy (in general).[43]

For Derrida, this "certain other light" is the power of nonmetaphysical critique, the watchfulness that the project or event of deconstruction requires, and one that is assailed on all sides by the "war of light" that it is also complicit within as the "lesser violence," a light that does not steadily blind but strikes (the shadow of Benjamin haunts this passage too) and disrupts its economicity: an irruption or arrest that distends its economy and its parametrics of inclusion and exclusion, that blocks its circulations.[44] And while Derrida's discussion of "the violence of light" is centered explicitly in the metaphorical light of metaphysics (and, to an equal degree, the metaphysical light of metaphorics), Derrida himself notes that this light, of whatever "certain" kind, is a broad and allusive category, with broad and allusive implications: in this heliopolitical "world of light and of unity, a 'philosophy of a world of light, a world without time',"[45]

> (e)verything given to me within light appears as given to myself by myself. Henceforward, the heliological *metaphor* only turns away our glance, providing an alibi for the historical violence of light: a displacement of technico-political oppression in the direction of philosophical discourse.[46]

So while the "war of light" Derrida speaks of is certainly not specific to spectacular society, this war certainly plays out within that terrain in historically unprecedented ways. The "counterlight" of metaphysics is what maintains the economy of violence, in the interest and in the mode of a "lesser violence," to be sure, but operative nonetheless. This war of light, then, is something that predates spectacular society as such, but the latter certainly extends it, broadening the field of battle, and absolutely to its own advantage in the equation.

Hence we might divert or refract the discussion of the violence of light to more literal and "material" territory, to encompass, as John McCumber suggests, the violence of our epistemic ocularcentrism, and from this the violence of the spectacle. In "Derrida and the Closure of Vision," McCumber neatly outlines the four characteristics of vision that have informed its status as a model for knowledge in Western philosophy, and against which Derrida mounts his critiques of ocularcentrism and phenomenology:

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[43] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 117.

[44] To be clear, the "war of light" Derrida speaks of is *not* spectacular society, but this war certainly plays out within it. The "counterlight" of metaphysics is what maintains the economy of violence, in the interest and in the mode of a "lesser violence," to be sure, but operative nonetheless. This war of light, then, is something that predates spectacular society as such, but the latter certainly extends it, broadening the field of battle, and absolutely to its own advantage in the equation.

[45] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 90.

[46] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 92.

> First, it is centered on the notion of "presence," itself understood on two levels: temporally, as the independence of the present moment from past and future; and epistemologically, as the presence-to-self, or self-certainty, of consciousness. (...)
>
> Second: The object of such vision – the particular kind of present at which it aims – is independent of its temporal context – and hence of all context. It is self sufficient, then, against the flux of time. It is – form: "Form is presence itself. Formality is that which presents itself in the thing in general, *allows itself to be seen*, gives itself to thought."
>
> Third: If vision is knowledge, and vision delivers form, then (as Aristotle argued in much detail) the thing can be known only insofar as it is form. So understood, philosophy's founding assimilation of knowledge is authorized by form: "The metaphysical domination of the concept of form cannot fail to give rise to a sort of submission to the gaze." There is, of course, a price to be paid for this, and that is the suppression of the other of form: of matter. The visionary model for knowledge thus becomes complicitous with what Derrida calls, in *La Voix et le phénomène*, the "founding opposition of metaphysics," that of form and matter, and with the reduction of matter to unknowability.
>
> Fourth: sight, thus subjected to form, becomes sound. For to reduce a being to its form means to assimilate it to the knower, as Aristotle pointed out; and as such assimilation can only be fully achieved when the object becomes, not merely assimilated to, but lodged within, the knower.[47]

It is clear enough that these characteristics (the last of which reflecting Derrida's deconstructive extensions of the previous in ways we will not have occasion to discuss here) not only define vision and its objects for philosophy, consequently defining philosophy around that vision, but also define violence for vision, consequently defining vision in such a way as to make it complicitous with that image of violence *as image*. It is also clear enough, from Derrida's perspective, that in the phenomenal world, and in the most general sense, whenever we are speaking of violence, we are speaking of light: how violence appears to sight (as phenomena) and is recognized as such, vis-à-vis the light of metaphysical critique. This proposition can be extended to include the economy and war of light in spectacular society, the permissibility of visibilities in the spectacle and the violent imaginary, and moreover can be reversed, to say that whenever we are speaking of light (again, in whatever sense), we are also always speaking of violence.

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[47] McCumber, "Derrida and the Closure of Vision," 236-237.

While from this set of principles and affinities it seems sensible to postulate that any theory or discussion which concerns itself with the visible is necessarily concerned with the question, problem, and thought of violence, we still haven't answered a fundamental question: *why* light? Why is light, for Derrida, "*the* element of violence" – not in the more abstract metaphorical or conceptual senses, but as *the specific condition of the understanding of violence as such*? Certainly, this is of a piece with Derrida's more overarching critiques of phenomenological quality of contemporary ocularcentrism as the primary force that bends and refracts the "light" of philosophical inquiry into nearly all matters to Heisenbergian effect: the eye that determines the object in its apprehension by dint of its structuring conditions, interested preconceptions, and limitations – in other words, a Kantian vision rather than a Bergsonian vision where perception and its limits reside in the object, not in the seer (the movement from one to the other being essential when attempting to understand a concept as multifaceted as "violence," and ultimately coming to bear on how one ethically regards the object as such). What is particularly important here, vis-à-vis the abstractions and displacements of the spectacle and the violent imaginary, is that *the "violence of light" is manifest in and equated with the suppression of matter in favor of form.* As such, and perhaps most urgently "in light of" spectacular society, the violence of light intimately concerns the matters of force and politics, which both rely upon and foster a certain suppressed and suppressing image of violence (and, to be sure, of themselves in relation to that image) in a wholesale spectacularization and spectralization of materiality as such.

But the relation between violence and the visible is in many ways antecedent to such ends and influences. To better understand the character and function of the visible and hidden violences that have informed our sense and sensibilities of this terrible "concept" as such, and to better situate this transfer and transformation within the immanent conditions of its understanding and experience in late capitalism, we would do well to step back and attend this *necessary* relationship between violence and the visible, and from this, between the visibility of violence and its functions. The latter part of this problematic will, in large part, be attended in later considerations of economies of force and their maintenance and instrumentalization in contemporary spectacular politics: in short, their means of visibility and visibility of means. The first part, however, is deeply rooted in the linguistic and conceptual history of the word "violence" – indeed in its roots themselves. The occidental connection between violence and the visible is thus neither accidental nor incidental: the senses in and means by which we understand violence, for good and ill, are consequences of a conceptual trajectory that can be etymologically traced back to the initial conditions of its conceptual constitution and understanding.

Violence, as Raymond Williams reminds us, "is from fw *violence*, oF, *violentia*, L – vehemence, impetuosity – ultimately from rw *vīs*, L – force."[48] The Latin root *vīs* – denoting "power" or "force," if not intralinguistically the ancillary and extensory connotations of authority, sovereignty, and law that its conceptual counterpart *Gewalt* encompasses as well – is the root not just of "violence" and its myriad mutations, but also of *vision* and, most directly in French (and in ways so important for Levinas), of *face* (i.e., *visage*: that which sees and can be seen; that apprehends what is before it and presents itself before itself to itself and others; that expresses, addresses, and speaks), and in these qualities is the fundamental but indeterminable nexus of identity, otherness, discourse, and ethics. The etymological roots of "violence," then, certainly inform its bound relationship with the visible in terms of its outwardness, externality, and frontality, and at the same time solidify the conceptual concatenations we see present in Derrida's text: that sight, vision, light, and faces of whatever sort are all inherently loci of force, all bound in an economy that by Levinas' expansive conceptualization is comprised of irreducibly ethical relations of difference, denial, and inequity, and in the final analysis a problem equally of and for power, its subject, and the imaginaries that enable each.

Fully complicit with the simultaneously phenomenal and mystical quality of law, this ocularcentric (and as such fully historical) fundament is the decisive condition determining all subsequent (and certainly political, and as such provisional and arbitrary) localizations and qualifications bearing on how violence is and is not to be understood. It is neither insignificant nor incidental, for example, that the first recognized use of violence as primarily physical force is of relatively recent vintage, dating back in record only to the late thirteenth century, and that the first naming of the "violent individual" as "violator" of both material and social forms emerges a full century later: these dividuating and stratifying localizations are presumably coordinate with increasing tension between the emerging bourgeoisie and the power structure of Medieval Christendom in the slow dawn of the Enlightenment.[49] But just as importantly, from this root-complex violence (to say nothing of vision and the face) is active and urgent in ways that have been essentially voided in the process of its nominalized spectacularization. The generally phenomenological and empirical senses in which we commonly take violence as a concept, and certainly within the context of its imaginary, directly inform its affinity with the imagistic, the iconic, and the objectile, as opposed (and perhaps contradictorily so) to the active, urgent, or agential, which by that imaginary's logos are abjectified as a matter of course. The extent to which violence has been conceptually disconnected from such activity and urgency owes in no small part to the fact that the verbal forms of the word – "to violence," "violencing," and so forth, forms tellingly awkward to both tongue and mind – have been lost to the dustbin of history: violence is finally divorced from such usage by the 18th century – not coincidentally at the same time at which the industrial revolution, industrial capitalism, and the liberal-democratic juridical/political system begin to reconfigure the Western landscape and modern episteme – at which point the concept settles into familiar contemporary common usage as an indexical catalogue of *acts* that are *ascriptionally violent*. With this substantive categorical shift, "violence" takes on the lexical, and primarily phenomenological, characteristics through and as which it is known today: the indicative/nominal (categorical and taxonomic) and the descriptive/attributional (ascriptional, adjectival, and adverbial), or more broadly, as simultaneously quantitative and qualitative with the defining boundaries and limits of each set by sovereign juridical decisions.

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[48] Williams, *Keywords*, 330.

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[49] While Chapter Three will attend in much more detail the relation between the bourgeoisie and a society's preferred and proferred images of violence, it does bear noting here that this too is a longstanding tradition, another point or plane of consistency. What seems crucial here is equally that these localizations of violence in active individuals considered as such both anticipate the advent of humanism and work against it: the violent individual is allowed to be individuated because his (individually-motivated and self-interested) actions are contrary to the relatively undifferentiated, unstratified, and disunified burghers of the era: in other words, individuation by way of violent ascriptions was on the one hand a punitive gesture, and on the other an abjectification that could lend a decisive order to an otherwise unstratified protocapitalist social arrangement whose development threatened the dominance of the church. As Donald Lowe observes in his *History of Bourgeois Perception*, "Medieval Christendom was a disparate world of irreconcilable institutions and values. It did not possess any synthesis. For inhabitants of that world, institutionalization was based upon the particular, personal experience of *socius*. There were innumerable, yet unstratified *socii*, but no sense of society at large, except maybe in the ideal of Christendom." (24) So while "during the thirteenth century, when credit, exchange, and banking enhanced business activities, Christianity maintained its vital hold on the urban populations by [taking] advantage of the new wealth to organize itself and extend its control over the countryside," (24) it is also clear that to maintain the power of the church vis-à-vis a social body that was increasingly stratified by other means required some means of instituting a counterstratification to maintain its status and authority in a time of crisis – and that localizing violence to these ends was one (if certainly not the only) means of doing so.

That the quantitative indicative/nominal form – that is, the objectivization of violence qua "thing," or more commonly, of a nominalist categorical inclusion, i.e., "an act of violence" – is particularly (and perhaps even "naturally") amenable to representation, reification, and spectacularization is simple enough to understand. But the qualitative, adjectival and adverbial usages that are also common (e.g., "a violent storm" or "a violent blow") are somewhat more problematic in this regard. On the one hand, as markers of intensity or intensive imbalances, we perhaps find a "truer" sense of violence as a quality of relation marked by an excess, distension, or irrupture of a given economy that both pushes against and reveals its limits. But at the same time, even in these attributional senses our relation to violence is also put firmly at the level of the image: as Roland Barthes so pithily notes, "a relationship which adjectivizes is on the side of the image, on the side of domination, of death."[50]

While instructive, these etymological/conceptual foundations only partially explain the relationship between the visible and violence, particularly because they don't tell us much about an equally important precondition: the distinction between vision and speech that makes the former not simply the element and habitat of violence, but also informs the way in which we "best comprehend" violence by its terms and not the latter's. While violence "cannot be spoken" – both because it constitutionally stands as the other or outside of discourse (e.g., the silence that is both the "worst violence" and an "absolute peace") and more immediately because it is the aporetic axis upon which all relations of determination turn – it is certainly *permitted*, and perhaps indeed only *possible*, within the visible. In his monograph on Foucault, Deleuze describes how the conditions of the visible and the articulable and the discursive formations to which they give rise – visibilities and statements – are substantively different in kind, as are their relative capacities to attend different types of phenomena in the production of knowledge. While complex (and, insofar as it is made in relation to both Deleuze's neo-Bergsonian conceptual archive and Foucault's specific formulations of discourse, power, and knowledge, more than a little idiosyncratic), this distinction is worth retracing if only because it further supplements that impossibility of "speaking of violence" we've just tarried with, complementing how Derrida regards that impossibility as something inherent not only to the "object" (violence) we always attempt to speak "about," but also to its proper mode of legibility and means of apprehension.

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[50] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 43.

According to Deleuze, neither statements nor visibilities are necessarily connected with subject or object in general, nor with specific subjectivities or objects: "visibilities," he says, "are neither the acts of a seeing subject nor the data of a visual meaning."[51] Instead, they are simply the conditions of possibility by which subjects and objects may see/speak or be seen/spoken, "opened or closed," and are constrained only to the extent that specific social-epistemic arrangements direct them, require certain parameters of closure and disclosure, and permit specific arrangements of knowledge and power. As he explains,

> [while] visibilities are never hidden, they are none the less not immediately seen or visible. They are even invisible so long as we consider only objects, things or perceptible qualities, and not the conditions which open them up. And if things close up again afterwards, visibilities become hazy or blurred to the point where 'self-evident' phenomena cannot be grasped by another age ... However, the conditions pertaining to visibility are not the way in which a subject sees: the subject who sees is himself a place within visibility, a function derived from visibility (as in the place of the king in classical representation, or the place of any observer in any prison system). (...) Therefore there is a 'there is' of light, a being of light or a light-being, just as there is a language-being. Each of them is an absolute and yet historical, since each is inseparable from the way in which it falls into a formation or corpus. The one makes visibilities visible or perceptible, just as the other made statements articulable, sayable or readable.[52]

This contradistinction and oppositionally-determined relation between visibilities and statements as absolute yet inseparable is critical, and not least because it puts in place a fundamentally agonistic and contestatory structure that is the logical complement to how violence is thought "in the first place." For Deleuze, statements (as discursive practices) and visibilities (as non-discursive practices) are fully incommensurable and fundamentally untranslatable. But always they are bound and interdependent, their specificities and limits complementary, *productive*: a "double rhythm" which in its oscillations in/form knowledge as

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[51] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 58.

[52] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 57-58. Brackets mine.

"the combinations of visible and articulable that are unique to each stratum or historical formation"[53]:

> It is in this sense that the visible and the statement form a stratum, one that is none the less continually crossed and constituted by a central archaeological fissure (Straub). As long as we stick to things and words we can believe that we are speaking of what we see, that we see what we are speaking of, and that the two are linked: in this way we remain on the level of an empirical exercise. But as soon as we open up words and things, as soon as we discover statements and visibilities, words and sight are raised to a higher existence that is *a priori*, so that each reaches its own unique limit which separates it from the other, a visible element that can only be seen, an articulable element that can only be spoken. And yet the unique limit that separates each one is also the common limit that links one to the other, a limit with two irregular faces, a blind word and a mute vision.[54]

The structure of this "relation of non-relation" is essentially economic, but there is no peace here: as much as a consequence of his own complicity in the language of the "war of light" as in homage to Foucault's belligerence,[55] Deleuze both symptomatically and sensibly frames this relation of non-relation as violent, saying that

> the two forms spill over into one another, as in a battle. The image of a battle signifies precisely that there is no isomorphism. The two heterogeneous forms comprise a condition and a conditioned element, light and visibilities, language and statements; however, the condition does not 'contain' the conditioned element but offers it in a space of dissemination, and offers up itself as a form of exteriority."[56]

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[53] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 50-51. As opposed to vision, for Derrida speech is a mode of dis-closure, hence its privileging as its own kind of counter-violence to a philosophy of presence, appearance, and closure (the "closure of metaphysics" is a double-genitive). Recalling the characteristics outlined by McCumber above, the sonorous quality Deleuze evokes here brings Foucault's analyses into close (and surprising) proximity to Derrida's critique of ocularcentrism and the "closure of vision."

[54] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 65. Deleuze's terse but noteworthy conclusion to this statement – "Foucault is uniquely akin to contemporary film" – will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter.

[55] Beyond this section's emblematic epigraphal citation from "Truth and Power," Deleuze speaks in most admirable terms about "Foucault's violence" in "A Portrait of Foucault" (*Negotiations*, specifically p.103).

[56] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 66. Deleuze's path to this statement is as follows: "How, then, is the non-relation a relation? Or, rather, is there a contradiction between these two statements by Foucault: on the one hand,

> it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similies, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax;

on the other,

> between the figure and the text we must admit a whole series of crisscrossings, or rather between the one and the other attacks are launched and arrows fly against the enemy target, campaigns designed to undermine and destroy, wounds and blows from the lance, a battle ... images falling in the midst of words, verbal flashes crisscrossing drawings ... discourse cutting into the form of things,

and vice versa." (65-66)

What mediates this battle and arranges the primacy of one stratum over the other is *power*: "a third agency [that coadapts] the visible and the articulable … in a different dimension to that of their respective forms."[57] It is at this point that we might come back to that question of the spectacle's role in all of this, as the determining force that organizes the relation of visibilities and statements, raising the former over the latter as the primary field of knowledge, both organizing and effecting violence in its own strata of virtualization and light. That the spectacle, as Debord defines it, is not images or a way of seeing but a complex of increasingly authorless and apocryphal historically and epistemologically situated relations between and to images is critical here, as is the quality of its violence, which as Agamben articulates it (to anticipate a coming discussion), is the depotentializing of expression (i.e., speech) in the spectacle's triumphal overtaking of language with image, as both correspond to the Deleuzo-Foucauldian concept of visibilities:

> Visibilities are not defined by sight but are complexes of actions and passions, actions and reactions, multisensorial complexes, which emerge into the light of day. (…) Must we then relate this first light in Foucault to Heidegger's *Lichtung* or to Merleau-Ponty, a free or open element that addresses itself to sight only secondarily? There are two points of difference: Foucault's light-being is inseparable from a particular mode, and while being *a priori* is none the less historical and epistemological rather than phenomenological; on the other hand it is not as open to the world as sight, since the word as statement finds completely different conditions for such and opening in the language-being and its historical modes.[58]

As both visibilities and statements are "forms of exteriority within which dispersion and dissemination take place" in the constitution and circulation of knowledge, we can better understand not only the inevitable necessity for violence to be exteriorized and given shape and objective form in either speaking of it or apprehending it as a phenomenon proper to the stratum of visibilities, but also, to the degree that these strata are complementary but incommensurable, that in the economy they establish and inhabit each takes and can only take the "objects" most appropriate to its capacities. In this, the conceptual constitution of violence itself as a complex of "actions and passions, actions and reactions," when coupled with the Foucauldian notion that visibilities "refer to a form of the *determinable*, which refuses to be reduced to the form of determination,"[59] can lead us to understand *a mutual*

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[57] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 68-69. Brackets mine.

[58] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 59.

[59] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 61.

determinability and essential affinity between violence (as a qualitative matter of affection and affectability, an indeterminable, "adiscursive" matter which takes the capacities of the statement to its limit) and the visible (as a non-discursive stratum within the discursive economy) which nonetheless determines it.

And it is also at this point that the peculiar and problematic *discursive* element of violence – its rendering-visible, and hence its operation and circulation within the discursive economy of visibilities and statements – can be better situated and understood vis-à-vis violence's conceptualization as the visible display of power. If in its most radical positive conceptualization violence is the antinomy of discourse, then its *rendering-discursive as a means of establishing a knowledge of violence* – such as is the case in the violent imaginary, its economy of images of violence and the violent – presents both the triumph of that discursive means of containment (undoubtedly, primarily in the rhetoric and general domain of images: the spectacle) and, at the same time, the most politically unstable nexus between and ordering discourse and its "absolute outside" imaginable. Like the tenuous capture and harnessing of the atom's power that has become so emblematic of both our "age of violence" and its mode of politics, spectacular society's firm yet slippery grasp on that which both makes it possible and threatens to undo it is a site of perhaps the most extremely regimented contestation and negotiation. It is more than certain that the violent imaginary that exploits the affinities between violence and the visible has its own violent effects, effects that are not simply to violence as "a concept," but moreover that are instrumental to the maintenance of the imaginary as imaginary, a maintenance of effects *as such* that places this imaginary in contact with others, stitching together the crazy quilt of discontinuous and overlapping veils that cannot be stripped away, like Salome's, to reveal the beautiful terror dancing beneath, that both comprise and negotiate the terms of the spectacle's violence. In this "general economy," the violent imaginary, for all its perverse mediations of the character, potentials, and aetiology of violence in contemporary thought and experience, holds sway all the more, both in that it gives requisite form and face to violence in those discursive manifestations and containments of violence with which we are all too familiar in spectacular society as a matter of (dis)course, and also in that it directs both violence and the parameters of its thought in such a way as to simultaneously diffuse its more radical conceptualizations and potentials and bring it into its most terrible form: "the worst violence" that, for all its operative monology, forceful immediacy, and procedural separations, is less the "death of discourse" of which Derrida speaks than its animated corpse, its simulacrum.

These, then, are fundamentally as much matters of force and power qualitatively considered as of their enactment and visibility as proof and display (or in a word, politics): both within and despite this "general economy of violence," today including this network of spectacular forces that enacts a certain and determining violence upon the subject within late-capitalism's operationally concerted discursive and socioeconomic structures, this violent imaginary manages the very idea *of* the idea of violence. Violence, by this general economy of speaking/non-speaking and revealing/non-revealing, of admission and inadmission, is generally unlocalizable in both source and effects, immanently apocryphal and dispersed; consequently, it must and can only be negotiated in its restricted and localizable instances and irruptions into consciousness. To address these latter concerns, we might first ask one more fundamental question to preface the spectacle's ownmost modes of violence: within this sphere, might the forces of power and discourse (as opposed to physical force) be rightly considered as violence, and if so, what is entailed in our relation to those determining forces, both for the concept of violence and the concept of the Self to which the former is so intimately, immanently bound?

A MATTER OF POWER, FORCE, & AFFECTION: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, SUBJECTIVATION, & THE PROBLEM OF "MATERIALITY"

We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects.[60]

Michel Foucault
"Two Lectures"

"The subject" is sometimes bandied about as if it were interchangeable with "the person" or "the individual." The genealogy of the subject as a critical category, however, suggests that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation. (...) No individual becomes a subject without first becoming subjected or undergoing a "subjectivation"... (...) A power exerted on *a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power* assumed by *the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming.*[61]

Judith Butler
The Psychic Life of Power

The power to be affected is like a *matter* *of force, while the power to affect is like a* *function* *of force.*[62]

Gilles Deleuze
Foucault

At this point, having proposed that violence is to be found in and as every determining or determinate relation, having proposed that violence is both the origin and the consequence of every system of power and knowledge, the question we are faced with might still and again be: "well, what *isn't* violence"? If violence, in the sense of Benjamin's *Gewalt*, can encompass both legitimate and illegitimate power and force, both authority and its undermining, both pure or divine justice and its ideologized simulacra, indeed, if violence is the indeterminate quality of *every* determining relation, and perhaps especially as the fulcrum by which the ideal of ideality itself may be determined, then we must more directly attend the question of the structural centrality of violence: a question ultimately calling for a consideration of the limits, if any, of what can be considered violence in structural or systemic (that is to say, naturalized, de-localized, and unattributive) terms.

If we attempt to call to consideration a certain violence at the heart of *every* distinction, determination, act, expression, decision, or manifestation of will, power, and identity (for this is where both Derrida's and de Vries and Weber's roads ultimately lead us), more questions arise. Does this concept of a general economy and generalized, even atomized dispersal of violence go too far? Does such a broad-based conceptualization of violence serve to intensify or to strip away its urgency by revealing its utterly quotidian, even banal manifestations, forms, and functions? Does the demonstration that "violence is everywhere," in ever-more miniscule, micropolitical, and relational-structural-systemic forms, in fact lessen the political potentialities, to say nothing of ethical responsibilities and material exigencies, of revolutionary violence and the structural or state violence it both opposes and validates through its very opposition? Indeed, insofar as both violence and force are most generally understood as instrumentally and intentionally directed from one determinate point toward or against an/other, is violence to be either solely or fully equated with force – such as, for example, the "force of subjection," the "force of law," and the "force of discourse"? Given its mooring in the visible and the face, can *any* relation with effects which might be considered "violent" but with dispersed, indeterminate, and apocryphal origin be considered *as* violence, with equal urgency and validity as those which follow these ascriptions "to the letter of the law"? More to the point: *where*, if such a thing can be determined, and *how*, as is so often opaquely determined, does force become violence – and the reverse? Where, in the broader planes of force-relations acting out upon and through the subject, is violence localizable and legible *as such* (as opposed, in a sense, to localized and recognizable by the terms of the violent imaginary), and how do these terms affect our ability to consider occluded systemic or structural violences in the first place?

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[60] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 97.
[61] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 10-11. Emphases hers.
[62] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 71. Emphases his.

To enter this discussion, we would do well to define what structural violence is and entails in the most immediate, material terms. As Dr. James Gilligan argues in his sociological-epidemiological study *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, structural violence has three defining characteristics which differentiate it not only from empirical violence, but from violence as a category altogether:

> - The lethal effects of structural violence operate continuously, rather than sporadically, whereas murders, suicides, executions, wars, and other forms of behavioral violence occur one at a time.
>
> - Structural violence operates more or less independently of individual acts; independent of individuals and groups (politicians, political parties, voters) whose decisions may nevertheless have lethal consequences for others.

- Structural violence is normally invisible, because it may appear to have had other (natural or violent) causes.[63]

From this basic situation, Gilligan argues that structural or systemic violence can and should be understood as a form of socioeconomic "relative deprivation," or to put it in finer terms, poverty as a violent act of omission, the Sartrean "inert violence" of social injustice and the attitudes that both permit and require it, "a function of class structure … itself a product of society's collective human choices, concerning how to distribute the collective wealth of the society."[64] The effects of such "choices" (and Gilligan is right to explicitly mark them as such: active and interested, rather than economic and structural facticities) not only include recognizable criminal violence, but more substantively the "collateral damage," so to speak, of these inequities, which for Gilligan includes deaths often attributed to "natural causes" (e.g., heart disease, hypertension, and cancer) that are in fact determinate outcomes of invested socioeconomic conditions.

The essentially violent substrate and systemic effects of capitalist economies is not merely an attitudinal or ideological matter: it is a matter of a *concerted and concentrated economy of violence* that, locally and globally, is irreducibly material in practice and effects. Drawing on empirical conclusions reached by a number of contemporary global comparative statistical studies, Gilligan estimates that between 14 and 18 million deaths each year are caused by structural violence, as opposed to roughly 100,000 per annum from armed conflict. Gilligan frames this crisis as such in no uncertain terms, against the measures which have come to represent the outer limits of regional and global violence: the Holocaust and the Cold War hypothetical casualty estimate of a US/USSR nuclear exchange. As he puts it,

> every fifteen years, on the average, as many people die because of relative poverty as would be killed in a nuclear war that caused 232 million deaths; and every single year, two to three times as many people die from poverty throughout the world as were killed by the Nazi genocide of the Jews over a six-year period. This is, in effect, the equivalent of an ongoing, unending, in fact accelerating, thermonuclear war, or genocide, perpetrated on the weak and poor every year of every decade, throughout the world.[65]

But if structural violence of the socioeconomically-determined sort is relatively incontestable (and, in fact, even spuriously acknowledged as such in public and political discourse, calling forth the rhetoric of a defensive and restorative "war on poverty" and so forth), other systemic violences with less empirically obvious effects – and particularly processes of subjectivation – are less easy to justify as such in a critique of violence, but are nonetheless equally real and pressing, particularly in their potentially infinite micropolitical forms extending through the totality of geopolitical relations. Indeed, as Derrida notes in no uncertain terms,

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[63] Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, 192.
[64] Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, 192.
[65] Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, 196.

> beyond [the] identified territories of juridico-politicization on the grand geopolitical scale, beyond all self-serving interpretations, beyond all determined and particular reappropriations of international law, other areas must constantly open up that at first can seem like secondary or marginal areas. This marginality also signifies that a violence, indeed a terrorism and other forms of hostage-taking are at work (the examples closest to us would be found in the area of laws on the teaching and practice of languages, the legitimization of canons, the military use of scientific research, abortion, euthanasia, problems of organ transplant, extra-uterine conception, bio-engineering, medical experimentation, the social treatment of AIDS, the macro- or micro-politics of drugs, the homeless, and so on, without forgetting, of course, the treatment of what we call animal life, animality...).[66]

The first and perhaps most obvious barrier to considering any systemic or structural violence as such (that is to say, to characterize force and power relations *as violent*) is in its primarily legal and phenomenological characterization as an act that implies and entails an interested, motivated, and necessarily human actor. Most simply, what and where are the actor and the victim – to say nothing of means, motive, and opportunity – when considering such a "violence"? Certainly, this question returns us to the most aporetic terrain: the self-preservatively occluded relation of violence to discourse and law vis-à-vis both the intrinsically violent character of each (i.e., as mechanisms of subjectification and politically-invested mediation in the permanent "war of light") and the traditionalist, if not purely imaginary, notions of what violence "requires" to be considered as such (i.e., visibility of cause and effect, identificatory clarity of oppositional parties, an encounter between those parties invested in reconciling or correcting an economic imbalance, etc.).

While these are not unrelated considerations – indeed, far from it – we might best take them in turn. Regarding the latter, it is clear enough that for the both the greatest and most limiting part, "violence," bound as it is within categories of law and the determination of self and other, requires an actor and an acted upon external to the first: victimizer and victimized, master and slave, predator and prey. In other words, violence to be considered as such must have a face, an identity forged not merely in apposition, but in opposition to an/other: "violence can only aim at the face," Levinas says, and by the terms of the violent imaginary, can only extend from one too – indeed, as we have already suggested, it is precisely in the concrete, spectacularized, and externalized localizations of violence in the other that permits the late-capitalist machine to run, and not least because these objective formalizations serve as potent affirmative points of nonrelation by which the late-capitalist subject may also "go about their business."

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[66] Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," 28-29. Brackets mine.

To be sure, this is also precisely the model by which many theories and critiques of subjection themselves operate, simultaneously allowing and disallowing us to consider in detail precisely what the "actor" that violence requires "is" when considering systemic or structural violence, returning to and repeating the aporetic of the discursive character of violence and the violence of discourse itself in their conceptual and methodological presuppositions. This is most clearly the case in the (oft-implicit) presupposition of subject(ivat)ion as a violation of an originarily self-same and self-determinable Being (be it the ideality of the presubjective state to which we are both compelled and terrified to return or some other kind of elementality or nature). Quid pro quo "on the other end of things," in order to be described, discussed, and positioned for critique, "power," "law," and so forth must also be figuratively illustrated (be it the Freudian Father, the Althusserian Police, the Foucauldian King, or the Arendtian Bomb) and given some kind of analogical or metaphorical shape (usually institutional or anthropomorphic, or per the contemporary legal definition of the corporation, a chimaera of both) to focus and legitimize a critique of structural relations that, however implicitly, are always-already marked as violent relations. However ultimately self-aggrandizing (that is, aggrandizing the idealist, egoist notion of the Self itself), there is clearly a necessity at stake in transposing an identity or imposing a figuration on discourse, power, or violence itself in order to corporeally attack it as it acts upon us, and such allegorizing maneuvers (of the sort emblematized by Jameson's somewhat nebulous concept of "cognitive mapping") are a problematic but necessary means of giving face and place to the otherwise inchoate forces in the economy of violence that comprises our contemporary mode of existence.

Indeed, such maneuvers (on "both sides") are perhaps all the more necessary in the context of the "transfinite space" of the late capitalist centerless state and its ever-more spectacularized relations of power, where power, while in certain senses very much in the hands and at the whims of men, is at the same time (and as always) external to them, a vast network, economy, and history of relations to which CEOs, presidents, tribal leaders, kings, despots, corporations, and so forth are only localizable indices, figureheads, and, like the empirical violences permitted to be brought to light by the terms of the violent imaginary, signifiers for a vast field of which they are only the most legible, epiphenomenal manifestation. But from this, a new problematic emerges: if we can meaningfully speak of an always-active apocryphal violence without evident author or means, but certainly with localizable victims and effects, does the problematic visibility of ends (re)emerge as more critical than anything else? Certainly, an undue emphasis on the visibility of ends replicates all kinds of deleterious logics, not least that ascriptions of agency are only conferred in presence of ends (as, say, in the final product of labor as proof of productive activity), and moreover tendentially affirms the maxim of contemporary consumer consciousness that there is no necessary need to "think the author/actor" in the irreducible presence of the ends (the consideration of production, in other words, eliminated in the valorized consideration of the product). Should we be able sidestep this very last pitfall, is there is a potentiality in recognizing these effects as indices of productive processes: the effects, in other words, giving these inchoate power and force relations a face in such a way as to think structural or systemic violence more expansively, with *violence both arising from and residing in the relations themselves*, and precisely to the degree that these relations present themselves as naturally or transcendentally given?

This authorless apocryphality and its exploitation vis-à-vis the subject is thus the most significant barrier in considering systemic violences, up to and including processes of subjectivation, as violence: if both the source and the subject (vis-à-vis the source, at least) are face-less, the relation by these terms cannot be registered as violent. By contrast, when the face is introduced into the equation (as in cinema), at least provisional loci of source or ends of violence can be recognized, isolated, felt with full force, but in the same movement returns us to the terrible egoisms and ipseities of the violent imaginary, to its mythic economy. That this double bind cannot be negotiated *without* the presence of the subject (as the central node at which ethics is necessarily reintroduced into a concept of violence that can be neutrally apprehended only if the material reality of the subject is put out of frame) is the double bind of thinking violence to begin with, and it also sets the aporia of Derrida's "originary violence" in a harsher light: as the condition of possibility for the individual as such, for the subject itself.

That violence is both inaugural and immanent to the Western concept of the self is critical here, particularly in relation to the other against which the self is posited. As Derrida says in *Archive Fever*,

> (a)s soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. *L' Un se garde de l'autre.* The One guards against/keeps some of the other. It protects *itself* from the other, but, in the movement of this jealous violence, it comprises in itself, thus guarding it, the self-otherness or self-difference (the difference from within oneself) which makes it One. The "One differing, deferring from itself." The One as the Other. At once, at the same time, but in a same time that is out of joint, the One forgets to remember itself to itself, it keeps and erases the archive of this injustice that it is. Of this violence that it does. *L' Un se fait violence.* The One makes itself violence. It violates and does violence to itself but it also institutes itself as violence. It becomes what it is, the very violence – that it does to itself. Self-determination as violence. *L' Un se garde de l' autre* *pour se faire violence* (*because* it makes itself violence and *so as* to make itself violence).[67]

In this passage, we can again recognize that the question of "what violence is (and isn't)" not only encompasses questions of sovereignty, deferral, avoidance, economy, and debt, but also (and always-already) implicates the subject as such. In Beardworth's words, the aporia here is that "the other presupposes being to 'be' another. For the other to appear as 'other,' for me to 'relate' to the other in a relation of 'non-relation,' the categories of being are presupposed."[68] Consequently (and of a consistent piece with all other systems' relation to their originary violence), the subject's relation to itself is also one which simultaneously denies its conditions of possibility (i.e., that the other is what constitutes the categories of being and relation) and consistently, actively reaffirms them in every repetition of self-affirmation, every encounter with the other: a self-affirmation, in other words, that is always also and equally a self-alienation.

Crucially, what the frame of the self/other "relation of non-relation" nominally ignores (and encourages to be ignored) the question of power altogether, instead fostering an image of subjectivity and subjectivation that is narcissistic and ego-centric. The subject ultimately both desires and comes to blame itself for its own determination, however much (and precisely inasmuch as) the violence of that determination is equally fundamental and proprietary to forces beyond (if not exactly "external to") the subject. As Judith Butler explains in *The Psychic Life of Power*,

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[67] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 78. Emphases his.

[68] Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, 124.

> (t)o desire the conditions of one's own subordination is thus required to persist as oneself. (…) It is not simply that one requires the recognition of the other and that a form of recognition is conferred through subordination, but rather that one is dependent on power for one's very formation, that the formation is impossible without dependency, and that the posture of the adult subject consists precisely in the denial and reenactment of this dependency. The 'I' emerges upon the condition that it deny its formation in dependency, the conditions of its own possibility."[69]

The violence of subjectivation, then, is for Butler one and the same with what she calls "the violence of conscience" and the "violence of consciousness" as two sides of the same coin. To be subject is always-already to be bound in a structure of denial and distance: denial of the fact of dependence, distanced from the fact of dependence and all that would mark it (the other, to be sure, but also power: the power of enunciation, the power of interpellation, the power of self-constitution and self-preservation). The ethical demand posed in the relation to the other is at once thwarted and turned inwards as the constitutive guilt that marks the subject: the subject feels, even knows its own insufficiency, its own dependency, its articulated-ness, the externality of meaning unto itself. Consequently, the source of this subjugation is isolated not as the structures of articulation and interpellation that constitute the subject as such – in a word, power – but rather the other as a threatening, localized figure (be it the nation-state, the foreign body, the business competitor, or whatever else) against which the subject's alienated aggression and *ressentiment* may be directed, framed therewith as a defensive counterviolence and not an act of aggression per se. In any event, the hands of power are clean, and free to operate as the internecine drama of the struggle for self-preservation and self-determination plays out with seeming independence from any overarching and concerted structure of force- and power-relations. Here as always, the violent imaginary is in full force and full effect, offering legible and externalized indices which permit the subject to soldier on in the perpetual war of all against all that is global capital, an offer that is more than freely accepted *gratis*.

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[69] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 9-10.

In materially absenting itself from these processes as an active agent, the essential materiality of the operations and effects of power which would permit us to name their violence is also masked: the enactments of power most often fall outside the phenomenal and into the apocryphal, and the effects of those enactments are manifest in registers equally indiscernible to (and strategically unacknowledged by) the eye of law. Of course, these problems are operationally and politically related, inasmuch as in a mirror-image of the mutual relation of law and violence, the activity of power too relies upon the presence of the subject which guarantees it. As Butler notes, "for power to act, there *must* be a subject, but that necessity does not make the subject into the origin of power."[70] Insofar as naming violence entails a material dimension in general, and perhaps particularly so vis-à-vis "the subject," there is a fundamental resistance embedded within *each* operative concept here which prevents such an ascription of materiality (hence violence) to what might otherwise be considered immaterial or virtual/ized relations and processes of socio-subjectival formation. But as Butler notes in her discussion of the materiality of subjectification in Althusser,

> (t)he constitution of the subject is *material* to the extent that this constitution takes place through *rituals*, and these rituals materialize "the ideas of the subject" (169). That is called "subjectivity," understood as the lived and imaginary experience of the subject, is itself derived from the material rituals by which subjects are constituted.[71]

In addition to echoing Derridean sentiments regarding the violence of repetition that marks the law's authority over the subjects of its discourse, Butler also calls into question a fundamentally Cartesian distinction vis-à-vis the subject which, as Mladen Dolar argues in "Beyond Interpellation," retains a "'pre-ideological' or 'pre-subjective' *material prima* that comes to haunt subjectivity once it is constituted as such."[72] For Dolar, there is thus a "radically immaterial" dimension of subjectivity, a "remainder" which Althusser elides – and which, if we are to extend this critique to the operative conceptualization of violence as materially manifested, intentional phenomena, places both the means (processes of subjection and subjectivation, the active and reiterative "discursive production of identities"[73] outlined in late Foucault) and the ends (subjectivity and the subject which bears its mark) in registers prior to, apart from, and perhaps always beyond violence. But as Butler contends,

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[70] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 203 n.5. The inversion of this postulate – that power is the origin of the subject – however, is precisely her point, inasmuch as it is always the case that "(a)s a condition, power precedes the subject." (13) As she explains (and in ways that more or less directly correlate with the above discussion of structural violence as an active process of social and individual life), "Power acts on the subject in at least two ways: first, as what makes the subject possible, the condition of its possibility and its formative occasion, and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's 'own' acting. As a subject *of* power (where 'of' connotes both 'belonging to' and 'wielding'), the subject eclipses the conditions of its own emergence; it eclipses power with power. The conditions not only make possible the subject but enter into the subject's formation. They are made present in the acts of that formation and in the acts of the subject that follow." (14)

[71] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 121-122. Paranthetical hers.

[72] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 120. Citation from Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation," 75.

> Dolar distinguishes between materiality and interiority, then loosely aligns that distinction with the Althusserian division between the materiality of the state apparatus and the putative ideality of subjectivity. In a formulation with strong Cartesian resonance, Dolar defines subjectivity through the notion of interiority and identifies as material the domain of exteriority (i.e., exterior to the subject). He presupposes that subjectivity consists in both interiority and ideality, whereas materiality belongs to its opposite, the countervailing exterior world.[74]

This, for Butler, is to fundamentally miss the point of Althusser's theory and contribution to Marxian studies of structural domination, insofar as for Althusser there is no rigid, much less tenable or sensible, distinction between the materiality of the base and the immateriality of the superstructure – rather, as Butler reminds us, there is an indissoluble "materiality *of* the ideological: 'an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material.'"[75]

By the terms of our discussion as well, such a premise also fundamentally misses the point – or more precisely, enables and perhaps authorizes us to miss the point that, in no uncertain terms, there is not only a violence of subjectivation, but that this violence is indeed material, and can be understood as such even by the terms of the violent imaginary which, by hook and by crook, works to elide that fact. That these rituals of subjectivation themselves find form and function in the most "immaterial" of registers – the spectacle, the image – also has no bearing on this fact: not only would such an idea absolutely rely upon the very same Cartesian (and, one would hasten to add, indissolubly bourgeois) distinctions as Dolar's argument, but it would also ignore the subsequent fact of the material productivity of such rituals (themselves images of a sort): as Butler says, "the rituals of ideology are material to the extent that they acquire a *productive* capacity and, in Althusser's text, what rituals produce are subjects."[76] And most importantly – particularly with regard to Gilligan's above description of how structural violence operates and is sustained – these subjects hold, extend, and act through, with, and upon ideas which themselves have an irreducible materiality despite all signs and actions to the contrary. In Althusser's words,

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[73] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 85. As Butler explains, "Subjectivation carries the paradox in itself: *assujetissement* denotes both the becoming of a subject and the process of subjection – one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency. For Foucault, this process of subjectivation takes place centrally through the body." (83) The idea that discourse "forms" the body is thus complex: bodies are not "discourse" per se, and forming is neither purely causing nor determining. "Such subjection," then, "is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject. Hence, subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a kind of restriction *in* production, a restriction without which the production of the subject cannot take place, a restriction through which that production takes place. (84, emphases hers)

[74] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 121.

[75] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 121. Citation from Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 166.

> (i)deas have disappeared as such (insofar as they are endowed with an ideal or spiritual existence), to the precise extent that it has emerged that their existence is inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals defined in the last instance by an ideological apparatus. It therefore appears that the subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system (set out in the order of real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, *which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief.*[77]

In recognizing the productive activity, essential force, and ultimate materiality of power as it acts and extends itself on and through the subject it in/forms, we can more meaningfully name the fullest range of structural violences as such, *and critically even by the "permissible" hegemonic definitions of violence that would and could never recognize it as such.* And once this task is done, the extent to which violence is always in some way a *material determinant of existence* becomes all the more immediate, the multifaceted constellations of complicities and victimizations all the more crystalline and distinct, and the nominal distinction between structural and empirical violence all the more untenable.

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In many ways, then, the image of violence we are advancing here is comprehensible by the same terms Foucault uses to situate disciplinary power in "Truth and Power": as a diagrammatic structure of force relations and relays that extend beyond whatever specific institution articulates those relations for its particular ends. For Foucault, power exceeds even the state as a "meta-power" that organizes the power relations of other apparatuses, institutions, and entities:

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[76] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 125.

[77] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 169-170, and "Ideologie," 109. Cited in Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 126. Emphases mine.

> The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. True, these networks stand in a conditioning-conditioned relationship to a kind of 'meta-power' which is structured essentially round a certain number of great prohibition functions; but this meta-power with its prohibitions can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power.[78]

While a force of *determination*, power exceeds the conceptualization (and instrumentalization) of a simply or purely *repressive* force. As such, it both does and does not correspond with violence: power retains a productive capacity and is marked by an evasion of instrumentality and intent that are verboten to violence as popularly and critically conceived. For Foucault, this raises a fundamental problem even for his own theorizations, which minimally imply a correspondence between the exercise of power and the waging of war in the post-Clausewitzean cosmology.[79] As Deleuze usefully suggests in his reading of Foucault in "Strategies or the Non-stratified: the Thought of the Outside (Power),"

> (i)f power is not simply violence, this is not only because it passes in itself through categories that express the relation between two forces (inciting, inducing, producing a useful effect, etc.) but also because, in relation to knowledge, it

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[78] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 122.

[79] The problem Foucault faces is articulated but not resolved in "Truth and Power," where interviewers Alessandro Fontana and Pascal Pasquino pose the following question: "You have said about power as an object of research that one has to invert Clausewitz's formula so as to arrive at the idea that politics is the continuation of war by other means. Does the military model seem to you on the basis of your most recent researches to be the best one for describing power; is war here simply a metaphorical model, or is it the literal, regular, everyday mode of operation of power?" Foucault – in a way that clearly is indebted to Hannah Arendt and, by the end, extricates himself from the problem and the solution – answers as follows: "This is the problem I now find myself confronting. As soon as one endeavours to detach power with its techniques and procedures from the form of law within which it has been theoretically confined up until now, one is driven to ask this basic question: isn't power simply a form of warlike domination? Shouldn't one therefore conceive all problems of power in terms of relations of war? Isn't power a sort of generalised war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the State? Peace would then be a form of war, and the State a means of waging it. A whole range of problems emerge here. Who wages war against whom? Is it between two classes, or more? Is it a war of all against all? What is the role of the army and military institutions in this civil society where permanent war is waged? What is the relevance of concepts of tactics and strategy for analyzing structures and political processes? What is the essence and mode of transformation of power relations? All these questions need to be explored. In any case it's astonishing to see how easily and self-evidently people talk of war-like relations of power or of class struggle without ever making it clear whether some form of war is meant, and if so what form." (*Power/Knowledge*, 123.)

> produces truth, in so far as it makes us see and speak. It produces truth as a problem."[80]

By these terms, then, power "exceeds" violence in both the sense that the exercise and operations of power are not limited to the kinds of repression and destruction bracketed as violence yet protected under the aegis of law, and also, even if the first part is problematic, that its effects are far more sweeping than those of empirical violence (as legibly discrete or interruptive phenomena), if ultimately no less affective.

Under this conceptual umbrella, the correspondence between violence and forces organized under and mobilized by a given mode of power (and particularly the forces of subjectivation) is no less complex. If we re/turn to the Deleuzian idea of modes of existence and matters of affection, the forces organized under a given mode of power would seem to be logically registered as violent: the reduction of the power to act as the expression and effect of a certain violence, recognizable as such insofar as it implies and entails a certain intent (the creation of the "docile body" or the "good subject," say) and a certain degree of unanswered determination (the constraint upon the mode of existence in some small way correlating to the violation of a certain potentiality by a more or less external and alterior force). But at the same time, Deleuze attempts to make a distinction between force and violence which complements that between power and violence, saying that

> Foucault is closer to Nietzsche (and to Marx), for whom the relation between forces greatly exceeds violence and cannot be defined by the latter. Violence acts on specific bodies, objects or beings whose form it destroys or changes, while force has no object other than that of other forces, and no being other than that of relation...[81]

At first blush, force seems to be considered somewhat apolitically here (as a "pure relation," essentially neutral and, to an extent echoing Dolar's sentiments, anterior to political influence or interest), and violence somewhat conservatively: as embodied and directed force, delimited and distilled for a purely instrumental purpose, with demonstrable and localized effects on demonstrable and localized forms (i.e., in the visible: the register in and through which violence is and is permitted to be made legible). In this, Deleuze and Foucault's understanding of the political utility of violence seems to operate within a more traditionalist mode of voluntarist-revolutionary Marxism, in the mode of Sorel, where the end of the strike is the destruction of a destructive dominant order, rather than also the reverse, or of Bataille, where the destruction of value seeks to thumb the nose toward the tyranny of exchange-value. Moreover, this conservatism might also seem to be a tipping of the hand to the singularity and aporetic impossibility that violence presents: here too, "for the sake of convenience," perhaps, violence is "let be," *in situ*, built around like Odysseus' Tree, monolithic, immovable, and mystical, and as such requiring a turn to legible forms putting at a distance those qualities, modes, and forms of violence that resist embodiment, localization, or discursive capture.

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[80] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 83.

[81] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 70.

But at the same time, in extending his diagrammatic reading of Foucauldian power Deleuze inverts what might be taken as the commonsensical notion of the force/violence relation: positing that violence is not an excess of force, but rather that the force *of* these forces exceed, in their effects, those of violence "proper" (or "mere violence": empirical violence). The conclusion we might draw from this is actually quite profound: that these relations are *more* violent than the nominalized violence they exceed, that their violence is all the stronger for not being named (or nameable) as such, and that if violence has a plane of transcendence (that is, where it transcends anything at all, even itself) it is that of force-relations, wherein violence is fully sublimated into the ether, the cosmos, the *beyond of violence.*

In the case of recognizably violent acts, and agents thereof, these differentiations of force and power relations from empirical violence is sensible enough, though not as cleanly-cut as they might appear in their materialist localizations vis-à-vis "bodies, objects, or beings." Certainly, for both Deleuze and Foucault, a "body, object, or being" can be a great many things, can include many things, and in any event is something produced, but never out of thin immaterial air: in the last instance it is a material effect of power *as and in its correspondence with* the material. For Foucault, it is not simply the case that the body is the field upon and through which heterogeneic forces may register or inscribe their material and determinant effects: the very subjectivity of the subject "proper" (the physical being in question as crude matter) is also granted formal materiality in Foucault that should be recognized. Yes, this subjectivity arises out of the heterogeneic relation of forces acting upon and through the subject and is thus always in some state of flux, but at the same time its designation as a *product(ion)* of these forces (viz. subjectivation) lends it a material, political, and indeed tendentially instrumental valence that cannot be ignored any more here than in claims that the economy of such forces is an essentially neutral, object-less field of pure means. In any case, what is at stake is a matter of determination vis-à-vis the dynamics of affection and affectability, of the increase or decrease in the power to act which, in the determination of the *means* to act, is an essentially *political* problem.

In sum, there is certainly a violent *quality* to these forces and their relations in Foucault; though they are not defined or codified as violence per se, their processes, their instrumental character, the nature of their relations, and the quality of their effects are viol*ent*: "In so far as power relations are an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces," he says in "The Confession of the Flesh," "it's clear that this implies an above and a below, a difference in potentials."[82] Thus, while there is clearly a violence in and of internalization of the law and/of discourse, and while the institution/repetition of these laws is as violent as the lingering, self-perpetuative effects (every interpellation, every desire redirected or shunted, as a psychic self-flagellation), Foucault seems to retain the symptomatic distinctions between the nominal and the adjectival, the characteristic and the qualitative, the essential and the definitional in his situation of violence.

Tracing these distinctions vis-à-vis Deleuze's reading of Foucault's work is thus problematic, both on the grounds of its material/corporeal insistence and in its ostensible political ambivalence. In the first case, the forces of discourse are already in Foucault repeatedly demonstrated to act in, on, and through not only bodies but, as Butler (following Althusser) suggests, also in, on, and through psyches, consciences, beliefs, and other more abstract and abstracted conceptual categories that arise out of both violent negotiations and foreclosures of negotiations between forces. In Foucault, in subjectivation the body becomes a text onto which violence is enacted, inscribed, and registered as a legible expression and constitution of power. But from this, the violence at stake (its instrumental value, so to speak) is not that against or upon the individual body (in the act of the inscription, this hardly matters at all: in the violence of making the body text of violence, promissory note of violence, the body of the victim, as *example*, is of ultimately negligible importance), but in the display thereof, in the image of force enacted – the body as image of the enactment of force, but as suppressed evidence of that force and its enactment *qua violence*. Violence, like power, is thus situated in and as the legibility and *enregistrement* of its effects through its display: this grounds the violence of disciplinarity (the threat reserved, withheld, and deferred by sovereign right) and is fully actualized in the Cold-War context Arendt will presently diagnose and describe. In the second case, the political interestedness of these forces – their desired ends and the instrumental means by which these ends are obtained and maintained – is a curious casualty of this exemption of violence from the spheres of force and power "proper," as is the question of sovereign justification. Precisely where (and why) these bodies have been buried in Foucault's formulations needs to be highlighted, for the obfuscation of the violence of subjectivization opens on questions of power, truth, and the motivated decisions that determine them.

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[82] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 200-201.

As Foucault argues in "Two Lectures," the question of legitimacy as it bears on matters of sovereignty and law is relatively unimportant: "Right should be viewed, I believe, not in terms of a legitimacy to be established, but in terms of the methods of subjugation it instigates."[83] The concern he tarries with is one, in fact, of an immanent *materialist* ethics of power and violence, of power in a sense exceeding its bounds and in so doing "becoming violence," but this exceeding nothing more than a visualization and concrete expression of its most basic tenets (power's "becoming violence" not as an excess of power or power in excess, but of its simplest, most irreducible expression of its principle and nature). As he explains,

> (i)n the very first place, it seemed important to accept that the analysis in question should not concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations, with the general mechanisms through which they operate, and the continual effects of these. On the contrary, it should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions. The paramount concern, in fact, would be with the point where power surmounts the rules of right which organise and delimit it and extends itself beyond them, invests itself in institutions, becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and eventually even *violent means of material intervention.* (...) In other words, one should try to locate power at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is always less legal in its character. (...) What is needed is a study of power in its external visage, at the point where it is in *direct and immediate relationship* with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there – that is to say – where it installs itself and *produces real effects.*[84]

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[83] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 96.

[84] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 96-97. Emphases mine.

Foucault continues here to explain the problem that sovereignty poses for political theory, and indeed the need to overcome questions of sovereignty altogether to understand politics as such:

> Sovereign, law and prohibition formed a system of representation of power which was extended during the subsequent era by the theories of right: political theory has never ceased to be obsessed with the person of the sovereign. Such theories still continue today to busy themselves with the problem of sovereignty. What we need, however, is a political philosophy that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the King's head: in political theory that has still to be done.[85]

This difficulty, however, is in large part due to that abiding (and, in the face of faceless power in the late-capitalist centerless state, perhaps deleteriously nostalgic at best, a way of expiating the guilt of complicity in its economy of violence at worst) need to (re)position such a locus for the thought of the State and of (its) power as such, either in emblematic personality-archetypes or in localized apparatuses which serve as likewise emblematic indices for that quasi-absent organization's methods and interests. While "the State" as such has not in fact or in any meaningful way "disappeared from the scene," and while its manifestations and operations under the conditions of late capitalism are in fact and in meaningful ways substantively reorganized, what Foucault seeks to emphasize is that

> relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State. In two senses: first of all because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations.[86]

What Foucault suggests here – and what his interviewers, Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino are keen to note – is that such a schematic, while indebted to a certain Marxianstructuralist orthodoxy of base and superstructurality that Foucault works to problematize in his "Two Lectures," offers a way out of thinking (or at least replicating at the level of formalization), "the dualism of political struggle between the State on the one hand and Revolution on the other,"[87] while at the same time retaining and recognizing the essential fact that capitalism's abiding structural investment in the perpetuity of conflict and contestation persists in ever-more local and micropolitical forms, saturating, as it were, the totality of all relations under its umbrella with its logic increasingly dispersed and naturalized ways (and, contra any strategic logic of unified or unifiable resistance, perhaps disastrously and irrevocably so were it not for the potentialities for recognition afforded by the "intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts"[88]).

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[85] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 121.

[86] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 122. In this, Foucault gestures toward what Agamben, both praising and problematizing a similar move on Antonio Negri's part in *Il potere costituente*, sees as the only possible means of understanding the difference between "constituting power" and "sovereign power" in a situation where the latter, however in actual decline, still retains (and indeed distracts from) the primacy of the former. The problem and the promise in Negri's distinction, as Agamben sees it, is that it "shows how constituting power, when conceived in all its radicality, ceases to be a strictly political concept and necessarily presents itself as a category of ontology. (…) And only if it is possible to think the relation between potentiality and actuality differently – and even to think beyond this relation – will it be possible to think a constituting power wholly released from the sovereign ban. Until a new and coherent ontology of potentiality (beyond the steps hat have been made in this direction by Spinoza, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) has replaced the ontology founded on the primacy of actuality and its relation to potentiality, a political theory freed from the aporias of sovereignty remains unthinkable." (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 44.)

Ultimately, Foucault understands classical notions of sovereign power and its attendant discourse on "right" to operate on a system of relations which "[encompass] the totality of the social body,"[89] but at the same time denote a specific and specified mode by which that power is and can be exercised in the sovereign-subject relationship. Contemporary modes of disciplinary power, by contrast, operate through specific and specified techniques, instruments, and apparatuses in ways that affect and are dependent on individual bodies within the social totality. As he explains,

> (t)his new mechanism of power is more dependent upon bodies and what they do than upon the Earth and its products. It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies or obligations distributed over time. It presupposes a tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign. It is ultimately dependent upon the principle, which introduces a genuinely new economy of power, that must be able simultaneously both to increase the subjected forces and to improve the force and efficacy of that which subjects them.[90]

"One of the great inventions of bourgeois society,"[91] disciplinary power thus "lies outside the form of sovereignty" and, in Foucault's reckoning, should have also expunged the entire juridical apparatus which marked sovereignty as such. "But in reality," he notes, "the theory of sovereignty has continued not only to exist as an ideology of right, but also to provide the organizing principle of … legal codes…"[92] These coeval but indissolubly heteronomic principles of power are the limits of power, taken together and in combination.

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[87] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 122.
[88] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 114.
[89] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 104.
[90] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 104.
[91] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 105.

But what we might ask – and indeed must ask in the context of the Bomb and the spectacular structure of deferral that marks the Cold War's own, enduring mode of disciplinary power – is whether there has been a return of this sovereign notion and application of power, or at least a renewed emphasis on what Foucault had isolated as its point of incommensurability with contemporary economies of power (themselves rooted, pace Foucault, in the prevailing socioeconomic structure and the bourgeoisie proper to that structure). For as Foucault argues,

> (t)he theory of sovereignty permits the foundation of an absolute power in the absolute expenditure of power. It does not allow for a calculation of power in terms of the minimum expenditure for the maximum return.[93]

Disciplinary power, in microscopically and micropolitically installing itself in subjects, adheres to and actualizes the latter principle in a truly dissymmetrical (hence violent) economy. But at the same time, inasmuch as under the spectacularized Cold-War logos this power and its expenditure reside on the side of the image – to use the most spectacular example, the quantitative tallies of munitions and their lethality, the disseminated images of arsenals on display, as displays of a potentiality that *might* be unleashed, sometime, somewhere – this perverse neo-sovereignty, with all of its messianic-apocalyptic trappings, is itself filtered through the modalities of disciplinarity: less an awkward coupling of irreducible and irreducibly heterogeneous incommensurates than precisely that structure, ideological and imagistic, of the sovereign alibi for disciplinary power that Foucault has described. And the way in which this dyad forges a specific relation not only to (and within) power, but also to (and within) violence, is absolutely crucial to their contemporary coordinated yet still aporetic relation: simultaneously localized in right and dispersed as a structuring component of contemporary modes of existence, simultaneously within and without the subject who is always the effect of power, the subject of violence.

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Is it enough, then, to say at this point that while not all force is violence, all forces may be violent, and hence violence is ultimately force (thus returning us to where we began)? Is it merely then a matter of degree, of intensity, of excess and spectacularity that differentiates violence from force absolutely and on all registers, or are there finer distinctions to be drawn? And to return to the question that continues to haunt this account (and, indeed, all accounts of violence in some way), where, and moreover how, does violence become "mere force": that is, where and how it is not only legitimized, but made part of the common texture of experience and relations? In "Force of Law," Derrida prefaces his address by noting (but not resolving) that the concept of "force" in whatever form is problematic precisely in that it, like violence, is irreducibly differential:

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[92] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 105.

[93] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 105.

> (R)ecourse to the word "force" is quite frequent, and in strategic places I would even say decisive, but at the same time always or almost always accompanied by an explicit reserve, a guardedness. I have often called for vigilance, I have asked myself to keep in mind the risks spread by this word, whether it be the risk of an obscure, substantialist, occulto-mystic concept or the risk of giving authorization to violent, unjust, arbitrary force. (…) A first precaution against the risks of substantialism or irrationalism I have just evoked involves the differential character of force. For me, it is always a question of differential force, of difference as difference of force, of force as *différance* (*différance* is a force *différée-différante*), of the relation between force and form, between force and signification, performative force, illocutionary or perlocutionary force, of persuasive and rhetorical force, of affirmation by signature, but also and especially of all the paradoxical situations in which the greatest force and the greatest weakness strangely enough exchange places. And that is the whole history.[94]

It is at this point that the door unequivocally opens on matters of politics, sovereignty, and deferral via the essential and functional correspondence between the violent imaginary and the axiomatic logic of capitalism. Because force relations operate in/as (an) economy, once an aberrant, asymmetric, or excessive factor is introduced into or allowed, by immanent, axiomatic law, to develop within that economy (that is, permitted or included within it, as opposed to emerging or erupting from it), it must adjust to accommodate it – an axiom analogously demonstrated in a market's tendency toward stabilization abutting, spurred by, and ultimately again resulting in a trend toward the more and more excessive, a mechaorganic economic tendency that both diastolically fosters and systolically neutralizes and purges excesses. As we have already argued, the violent imaginary is invested as much in reifying violence as a simultaneously singular and fungible concept as it is in maintaining a looseness of its material and ethical parameters: both concrete and diffused, determinate but always amenable to redetermination, the concept of violence in this imaginary is *axiomatic*, simultaneously informed by and informing capitalist arrangements of truth and knowledge, (and ultimately, perhaps, only able to be strategically countered by reappropriating these very same terms[95]). Indeed, it is this axiomatic quality that enables and authorizes the shifting line between force and violence, obfuscating in each tenuous inclusion the exclusions, exceptions, and accommodations that are both *du jour* and *de jure*.

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[94] Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," 7.

It is not the case, then, that when it comes to violence, late capitalism or its metastasized manifestation as the society of the spectacle must open outward to encompass and contain the violences that extend from them as their "unfortunate effects," "excesses," or even "points of resistance": these categories are always-already predetermined by the very terms they set forth, in such a way that the strike, waste or excess of value, criminality, silence, absence, and so forth are all equally axiomatically re/appropriatable. As Brian Massumi says,

> (t)he autonomic supersystem of global capitalism works by making ever-finer *differentiations* as part of a continuing, generalized process of adaptational recomposition that reshuffles the cards and changes the rules of the game at every turn, in response to frictions arising from its functioning (trade-related nonwars) as well as to perturbations from without (antigovernment isolationism). The 'implosions' and 'aporias' are real, supersystemic elasticities enabling the recomposition and mutual readjustment of constituent subsystems. Contemporary capitalist power is metaconstructivist, as must be its critique. And all critique of power must participate, directly or indirectly, lucidly or deliriously, in the critique of capitalism, or risk falling into instant obsolescence in the ever-changing landscape it governs."[96]

Thus, while it may *appear* that such systems find ways to incorporate and productively utilize their unthoughts and excrescences, these have already been determined by the structures themselves, hence the ease with which they can be and are reappropriated: it's not a matter of strength or force of capture as a tactical reaction so much as a strategic positioning and preexisting *mastery and determination* of the field and its fluidity. This mastery entails more than the degree to which this supposed "outside" or point of alterity is in fact present, central, and vital *to* the interiority of such systems (its operational mechanisms more or less refined to the point that they pose little threat of breakdown): it also, as suggested in our introduction, decisively entails the degree to which this "absent presence" is today fundamentally unconcealed, the degree to which there is no longer any substantive or necessary attempt on the part of capitalism or the spectacle to conceal their inherent, coordinated violences, always on display, always celebrated and explicitly threatening, yet nonetheless always accepted, even embraced. It is thus that, when whatever "new extremities" in the thought (or indeed forms) of violence emerge, it is more useful to think of them less as unassimilable, oppositional, or intractable "points of resistance" (especially in the visible/visual field) than as new *permissibilities*, new *exceptions to the rule which is superficially rewritten with every new inclusion*. It is also less that the visibility of violence has reached an axiomatic crisis or breaking point in its current hypostatic transparency (systemic desperation, including all it can by its own self-destructive and dispersive logic) than that it has opened up on multiple states and spheres of exception, which may indeed precipitate certain crises, but none that cannot be handled (the crises that open in a state of permanent crisis, after all, are not all that critical).

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[95] As Foucault notes in his own series of "counteraxioms" closing "Truth and Power," "'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements [and, curiously, not visibilities]. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'régime' of truth. This régime is not merely ideological or superstructural; it was a condition of the formation and development of capitalism." (*Power/Knowledge*, 133; brackets mine)

[96] Massumi, "Requiem for Our Prospective Dead," 53.

So while force and violence are both qualitatively differential, there is no clear qualitative differentiation between them from an objectively determined intensive or extensive perspective (the "baseline," such as it is, itself determined within fluid and relative movements): this territorial demarcation is and can only be determined discursively, politically, and according to the immanent conditions and constraints of each. Violence also cannot be determined by matters of degree of intensity as specific excesses in the enactment of force (the "excessive violence" of police or military action, say, or of the riot, strike, or whatever other offense to law against which the former are economically directed and deployed), and certainly not by a relative and essentially arbitrary degree of "excess" vis-à-vis the nonexistent baseline of "force" in whatever type of social activity: in either case, this ignores the violence of sustained pressures, and is also problematic given the means by which such excesses are able to be understood, registered, and either rejected or accommodated by the system itself. Quite far from constituting the limit of politics (Arendt's maxim) or discourse (Derrida's point of insistence), these systems within the spectacular sphere are more than capable of comprehending or speaking violence: it is their native tongue.

Ultimately, determining the point at which force becomes violence is a question posed for, to, and by power in its enactment: it is a *strategic decision* informed by the power of power to define its operative terms, *to give itself a face*. It is thus that whatever determination of what is or is not violence, what it can or cannot be, what is allowed to be made visible and what is to be allowed to fade back into the fabric of our (and others') unconscious and experience falls first on the judgment and justification of its degrees and damage, its impact and its aftermath, its means and ends. Ultimately, in our contemporary (and in many ways only nominally "post-Cold War") context the differentiation between force and violence – the point at which force becomes violence, and more importantly the point at which violence becomes "merely" force, justified and sanctioned, cordoned off from its negative connotations yet still contained within a specific, sovereign economy of force apart from and acting upon the subject "proper" – is concerned with the intersection of image and power: a *political* problematic.

At this point, then, we must inhabit a final reframing of the concept, one that attends and engages the violent imaginary in a precarious balance of means, ends, justification and power. The seemingly purely instrumental character of violence we have been tarrying with relies upon a fundamental, and absolutely crucial, operative distinction: force is conceptualized as a "pure means" constituted and comprehensible only as such within the matrices of other forces in relation, while violence, by contrast, is understood as a means to a determinate and determinable end (and not, crucially, as an "end in itself": total, structuring violence as an operative axiom). But as Arendt and Agamben will lead us to understand, the conditions of late capitalism and spectacular society deeply problematize the very nature of the means-ends relation itself, to the ultimate end that all means are means without end, and all ends spectral, indeterminate, apocalyptic, and deferred: a general condition that cuts to a fundamentally new conceptualization of violence vis-à-vis the political and ethical (and the reverse).

A MATTER OF POLITICS & SOVEREIGNTY: THE AMBIVALENCE OF *GEWALT* & THE VIOLENCE OF DEFERRAL IN A "POLITICS OF PURE MEANS"

Madet orbis mutuo sanguine … homicidium quum admittunt singuli, crimen est, virtus vocatur quum publice geritur.[97]

Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus
(St. Cyprian, A.D. 200-258)
Epistulae, I, 6

No doubt, the equivocation between religious violence and political action is continual, but in two ways, the political, to which I aspire, before which I live, is always an end. Being an end, it is excluded from calculation, which is proper to the means. Full violence *can be the means to no end. It would be subordinate to no goal.*[98]

Georges Bataille
"Pure Happiness"

The concepts of sovereignty *and* constituent power, *which are at the core of our political tradition, have to be abandoned or, at least, to be thought all over again.*[99]

Giorgio Agamben
"Notes on Politics"

To explore how on the one hand violence poses fundamental problem in contemporary political discourse for classical models of sovereignty, and on the other how recent developments in the nature of sovereignty itself have impacted the ways in which violence is conceptualized and politically mobilized, we might best turn to Hannah Arendt's 1969 treatise *On Violence.* While Arendt makes no specific reference to Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" in her text, both Arendt and Benjamin explicitly regard violence as something apart from its overt ends, forms, or acts: if in markedly different ways that signal a qualitative transformation in the sovereign justification and deployment of violence, both frame the question of violence within the potentialities and ethical implications of a *politics of pure means* that bears on the ways in which power, politics and politicking render the means-ends relation itself vis-à-vis their relation (or non-relation) to violence and its just, rational exercise.

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[97] "The world is drenched in mutual slaughter. … Held to be a crime when committed by individuals, homicide is called a virtue when committed by the state."

[98] Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 229. Emphases his. For all his characteristic hyperbole, Bataille's footnote here usefully suggests that the "true access to violence" – by his terms, a knowledge of the divine – is only to be found in the dream, in the image: "The violence I am dreaming of, having no meaning but itself, independent of its effects (of its utility), is not forcibly limited to the 'spiritual' domain, but it can be. If it is not, this can have consequences, if not immediately. The only immediate consequence of unlimited violence is death. Violence reduced to a means is an end in the service of a means – it is a god become a servant, deprived of divine truth: a means has no meaning but the desired goal, that which serves the means should be an end: in the inverted world, servitude is infinite." (291-292 n.1)

[99] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 112.

For Benjamin, the aporia of *Gewalt* gives rise to two related problematics: first, the means by which violence is justified by the state, and second, the means by which we can conceive of a truly revolutionary violence that both evades and destroys the image and use of violence by the state: a violence that is neither law-breaking nor law-preserving (both, of course, being ultimately the same thing). The image of violence cast either against or by that of law, as Benjamin understands it (and as should be familiar by now), frames violence as an *instrumental means* toward a determinate political end that itself is the justification for those means, a door that swings both ways but on a common hinge; consequently,

> (a)ll violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity. It follows, however, that all violence as a means, even in the most favorable case, is implicated in the problematic nature of law itself.[100]

His critique seeks to interrogate the possibility of a *truly legitimate* violence beyond its instrumentalization to the ends of power, which is either proactively or retroactively qualified in law: a "noninstrumental pure means" beyond law and (its) violence, a *pure mediation* that, in a word, is politics in the mode of those pure means "which govern peaceful intercourse between private persons."[101] What is at stake here is the conceptualization of a sphere of politics and praxis beyond violence, as a truly disruptive force to intervene in the vicious oscillation between law-preserving and lawmaking violence that founds and extends the authority of power to enact violence, essentially, as it sees fit, as a means of guaranteeing what it itself posits as the most inassailably justified end: its own existence, which *ipso facto* is guaranteed only through the political use and perpetuity of violence; a potentially endless amplification. As he explains,

> (t)he law of their oscillation rests on the fact that all law-preserving violence, in its duration, indirectly weakens the lawmaking violence represented by it, through the suppression of hostile counterviolence. ... This lasts until either new forces or those earlier supposed triumph over the hitherto lawmaking violence and thus found a new law, destined in its turn to decay. On the breaking of this cycle maintained by mythical forms of law, on the suspension of law with all the forces on which it depends as they depend on it, finally therefore on the abolition of state power, a

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[100] Benjamin, *Reflections*, 287.
[101] Benjamin, *Reflections*, 291.

> new historical epoch is founded. If the rule of myth is broken occasionally in the present age, the coming age is not so unimaginably remote that an attack on law is altogether futile.[102]

The key politico-ethical problem Benjamin isolates in his discourse on violence and justice is most explicitly posed not in "Critique of Violence" but in the later "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where he remarks on the potential for (and, by the same token, the potentials in) a world in which *the state of exception is the rule*, where arbitrariness, irrationality, and barbarism are permitted to reign supreme, where violence against the very life that sovereignty was supposed to guarantee would and could be the order of the day and the very (non-)form of law, where politics itself would be the guarantor and extension of a total violence over and against life itself. He says,

> The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.[103]

In the state's enduring Weberian monopoly on violence, the legitimate use (or holding-in-reserve of that use) of violence is that which problematically lends legitimacy to power within limits of the universality of law and the universality of violence which founds it. But increasingly within this economy of universals, as Stathis Gourgouris observes,

> law-making bodies (parliaments, senators) often introduce or modify laws, and sometimes in summary fashion – as "states of exception" – for the singular purpose of preserving order. The blurring of limits is hardly surprising. Law is by necessity involved in a discourse of limits, of boundaries. Its nominal purpose, if nothing else, is to set limits and discipline society to respect those limits. But we know that the discourse of limits is by definition ambiguous. Whatever force draws as the limit also opens itself to contamination from what is being (de)limited. Thus, the means

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[102] Benjamin, *Reflections*, 300.

[103] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257. This line of thought is presaged in Benjamin's 1928 *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, where he establishes an image of baroque "white eschatology" and the problems it poses for the figure of the sovereign as the force of justice and the decision: in other words, a state of *indeterminacy* borne of "(t)he antithesis between the power of the ruler [i.e., sovereign power] and his capacity to rule [i.e., the capacity to exercise that power]," where "(t)he prince [sovereign], who is responsible for making the decision to proclaim the state of emergency [i.e., the state of exception], reveals, at the first opportunity, that he is almost incapable of making a decision." (70-71; brackets mine to echo relevant emphases in Agamben's translation of this passage in *State of Exception*, 55-56)

> of law's social disciplines can be said to exist in a constant see-saw struggle with the power exerted by the notion of limits. Violence may be perhaps the most dramatic expression of law's encounter with its limit. Violence is what makes the performance of this encounter visible, what makes the blurring of the limit visible (keeping in mind that the blur is the proposition of the limit.)[104]

In sum, the universal appeals upon which the legitimate use of violence rest are always-already (and, today, primarily and nakedly) suborned to the exceptional and arbitrary law of the particular; as Agamben has recently lamented, Benjamin's prophesies appear to have been fulfilled not only under, but by the spectacle's subsumption of politics into its own logic of division, separation, and abstraction:

> State power today is no longer founded on the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence – a monopoly that states share increasingly willingly with other nonsovereign organizations such as the United Nations and terrorist organizations; rather, it is founded above all on the control of appearance (of *doxa*). The fact that politics constitutes itself as an autonomous sphere goes hand in hand with the separation of the face in the world of spectacle. Exposition thus transforms itself into a value that is accumulated in images and in the media, while a new class of bureaucrats jealously watches over its management.[105]

This permanent state of exception and crisis that is part and parcel with the spectralization of power, politics, and consequently violence is also precisely what Arendt isolates in *On Violence*. To be sure (and certainly not least given the generalized moment of crisis from which this essay arose), Arendt is keenly aware of the saturation of violence in the conditions of late-capitalist Western culture, and specifically as it is suffused with the spectrality and spectacularity of its relations which demand a rethinking of the politics of violence and, indeed, the very relation between violence and politics. For Arendt, this necessary rethinking hinges on two key considerations of the late-capitalist turn: first, the change in the scope and scale of the means and ends of state violence (means and ends that have reached and surpassed the absolute limits of rationalism and instrumentality by which they had previously been defined), and second, a more generalized shift in the thought of relations and political efficacy in an increasingly dispersed and totalized geopolitical space.

In sum, Arendt sees in the post-nuclear late-capitalist landscape a situation whereby power and violence are undifferentiated – but not undifferentiatable. In this state of saturated violence, and one (for Arendt's argument at least) more or less only surreptitiously informed by prevailing economic conditions, Arendt makes her thetic intervention against the prevailing thought of violence as a marginal and aberrant happenstance, a fly in the otherwise soothing balm of modern experience:

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[104] Gourgouris, "Enlightenment and *Paranomia*," 129.
[105] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 95.

> No one engaged in the thought about history and politics can remain unaware of the enormous role violence has always played in human affairs, and it is at first glance rather surprising that violence has been singled out so seldom for special consideration. (...) This shows to what an extent *violence and its arbitrariness were taken for granted and therefore neglected*; no one questions or examines what is obvious to all. (...) Anybody looking for some kind of sense in the records of the past was almost bound to see *violence as a marginal phenomenon*. Whether it is Clausewitz calling war "the continuation of politics by other means," or Engels defining violence as the accelerator of economic development, the emphasis is on political or economic continuity, on the continuity of a process that remains *determined by* what preceded violent action. (...) *Today all these old verities about the relation between war and politics or about violence and power have become inapplicable.*[106]

This passage brings to light a number of crucial considerations, and some problems of the sort noted in our opening passages. Clearly, Arendt is keen to note the types of experiential exclusion and systemically ghettoizing marginalization of violence into the purely phenomenal register that the ideological exigencies of modernity (and its thought) necessitate. Furthermore, Arendt seems to recognize in her dismissal of the "old verities" that violence is not only an open question but an inexorably historical one, one that cannot be bound to proud and definitive proclamations about its nature, not outside the historical but arising from it, immanent to its movement, even compelling it (shades of Levinas). This is why, however notable this last, destructive statement in the passage may be, Arendt indeed *needs* these "old verities": while her gesture can be read as a matter of proto-postmodern fervor to do away with the past or as an inevitably nostalgic reaction to a world so seemingly suddenly turned about, it equally suggests that this abandonment is first and foremost one actualized by power itself as a means of making appeals to the contrary irrelevant (in other words, when all bets are off, no appeals to the unfairness or illogicity of the play are permitted either). She also hints at the idea of a structural, systemic, and categorical economy of violence proper to modernity entire as a continuity of relations enabled by violence, accompanied by and requiring the image of a characteristic *arbitrariness* of violence, which is the traditional political requirement of any rationalist, productive system of power to distance itself from the irrationality, destruction, and violence that is its first and final condition of possibility.

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[106] Arendt, *On Violence*, 8-9. Emphases mine.

Arbitrariness is crucial here, for Arendt's thought and the present endeavor: it is a triply-articulated concept that touches upon and extends the terms we've been working with into the field of spectacular politics. In one sense, Arendt embraces and inverts that notion of violence as arbitrary in the phenomenal sense: that is, violence both as the aberrant and unexpected (the classical framing of the relation) and in the anticipated-but-not-yet-actualized random terror of the unexpected (the mode of relation proper to the atomic age). In sum, violence is framed both as an event and its infinite deferral – the latter, as Derrida suggests, being of a piece with the apocalyptic thrust and messianic spectrality that are structurally integral to the liberal-democratic promise:

> (T)he effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come [*l'à-venir*] of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated.[107]

Perhaps the strongest articulation of the democratic promise (or at least of its logic, from manifest destiny to mutually assured destruction), this generalized eschatology, inexorably political with the highest of sovereign alibis, informs, enables, and authorizes the deferred violence that is the fundament, form, and effect of Cold War power: it is spectral, the expression of *spec*-trality.

In a second and equally important sense, the arbitrariness of what violence signifies and what is signified as violence is also in play: the crisis of the aporetic relation between violence and discourse, law, power, and so forth necessitating expulsive and exculpatory maneuvers within these latter fields to both negatively and positively define violence in ways that arbitrarily ascribe violence certain forms and qualities. Arendt's formulation minimally suggests that in contemporary geopolitical relations, the old aporia of law's relation to violence is no longer valid either, as much because the potential for state violence has changed (violence beyond all rationality) as because law itself has changed: rather than the organizing ethical trope of power, power now may fully exist outside the law, above and beyond it, and to the degree that the law itself is rewritten as it is spoken. Law has disappeared, like the justices vanishing in the blink of an eye in the final shot of *The Parallax*

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[107] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 65. Brackets translator's.

View (Pakula, 1974), into a spectral power without center but with many faces: the atomic bomb, the detention camp, the labyrinthine halls of government, and the anonymous organization men whose decisions steer and shape the fate of all.

Given the exigencies of the thought of violence in the spectacular age, it is all the more understandable that, for Arendt, the thought of violence is inseparable from the thought of power in the atomic age: everywhere and nowhere, ethereal but as essential to our being as the hydrogen atom, waiting to be unleashed. But this is not the only enabling condition of such a thought, however powerful the literal threat of annihilation this perverse face of power is. For Baudrillard, for example, the dissimulation of power and knowledge into simulacra of the same is a semiological apocalypse, an atomic epistemology wherein the metaphorical model of the nuclear is most apt, as the culmination and maximization of all available energy which (perhaps paradoxically, but absolutely as a matter of economicity in extremis) freezes it at a point of critical mass, and where the only conceivable or foreseeable end is a wholesale implosion, a meltdown:

> The nuclear is at once the culminating point of available energy and the maximization of energy control systems. Lockdown and control increase in direct proportion to (and undoubtedly even faster than) liberating potentialities. This was already the aporia of the modern revolution. It is still the absolute paradox of the nuclear. Energies freeze in their own fire, they deter themselves. One can no longer imagine what project, what power, what strategy, what subject could exist behind this enclosure, this vast saturation of a system by its own forces, now neutralized, unusable, unintelligible, nonexplosive – except for the possibility of *an explosion toward the center*, of an *implosion* where all these energies would be abolished in a catastrophic process (in the literal sense, that is to say in the sense of a reversion of the whole cycle toward a minimal point, of a reversion of energies toward a minimal threshold).[108]

Likewise, the spectacle is the (also perhaps paradoxical) fruition of capital (the tools of which – deterrence, disconnection, deterritorialization, and abstraction – both liquidate and reinforce reality) and of our "essential force;" our relation to the latter, as to capital, both political and phantasmatic as we are engulfed in its spectral power of absent presence. In this "transfinite space," the image replaces power, the simulation of power is dedicated to the (visible) effects of power, and we adhere to these phantasmic indices out of the terror of their (already-effected) collapse, to defer the melancholy of a world without power.

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[108] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 40. Emphases his.

The most pronounced and paradoxical manifestation of this drive is in the formulation that Arendt explores throughout this essay: the inversion of the Clausewitzian dictum to propose that peace is the continuation of war by other means, extended to the irrational syllogism supporting the paralogical and ouroboreal maxim "to secure peace is to prepare for war": nonviolence requires the perpetuity of violence, ergo violence (deferred, to be sure, but certainly otherwise as well) is peace. In this way, power is not only able to justify its mode of violence and the state of perpetual crisis it precipitates, but is also able to essentially embrace and nullify the aporetic relation between law and violence on its own terms, to its own ends, guaranteeing its perpetuity.

Finally, deriving from and encompassing these first two, there is a third arbitrariness latent in Arendt's text that, in political terms, is of the most profound concern: the arbitrariness of the decision that founds the expression of sovereignty and the exercise, implementation and maintenance of violence, either in specific moments (as in acts of war, of assassination, and so forth) or in a general state of economically managed structural violence. This decision not only comes to bear on the use of violence, but on the very form of life that violence takes as its object, a decision ultimately to suspend the law as such in the favor of power, and in such a way as to make violence and the proprietary right to decide upon its use the proper mode of power itself: in other words, a subordination of the hitherto universal and sacralized categories of life, law, right, and violence to the particularity of the exceptionalizing decisions that constitute the rule, a state of pure permissibility for sovereign violence, of infinite possibility for the modes, means, and moments in which violence may be manifested.

If nothing else, Arendt's treatise provides a crucial marker for the revolution of the thought of violence in the full yet early bloom of late capitalism, of a world newly conscious (if this is not too strong a word) of its reconfigured status under the force and logic of a global economic and media-ted order wherein it is not simply violence that must be managed, but more importantly the *idea* of violence as a politico-discursive guarantor of power. This "new" configuration of the consciousness of violence and its political utility has several implications here. First, the Cold War/post-nuclear ethos of mutually assured destruction both establishes and denies access of consciousness to the systemic violence of terror, paranoia, subjection and, not least, the processes of global economic expansion (the

Cold War, unified at its apogee under the Reaganist dictum that "markets are more powerful than armies," as one of all-too-real weapons aimed at economic ideologies, consequently constituting the latter as weapons of equal force). Arendt sees a terrifying, but (by way of the logic of the "big lie") pervasively resolved, contradiction and schizophrenia emerge: the "resurrected arbitrariness" of violence – now pushed past all reason and logicity of means to the end of either asserting or maintaining power, and coupled with a sense of this violence's imminence in and immanence to the post-Hiroshima era – is nostalgically reframed in terms of quasi-rationalist absolutes, as part and parcel with the larger economy of sovereign forces and their incontestable, inassailable assurances of manifest right and destiny.

It is in these hyperbolizations that Arendt's treatise not only recognizes the aporetic paradoxes that are always-already at the very core of the thought of violence, but reveals the degree to which they are today taken to the limits of their terms, and transparently, clearly, unobscured: in Beatrice Hanssen's words, "(t)he destructive potential of the century belied the ostensibly marginal position to which the phenomenon of violence had been relegated in nineteenth-century social and political theory."[109] Violence – and moreover the potential for total, apocalyptic violence – can no longer be thought exclusively in terms of the outside, nor meaningfully in terms of systematic aberrancy, nor even within the rationalist sphere of algebraically justified means and ends. Rather, in a properly apocalyptic gesture, violence is *nakedly and visibly revealed* as the balancing reagent in the economy of geopolitical power, saturating the logic of that balance under the irrational presupposition that total war (and the promise thereof, endlessly and excruciatingly deferred and extended in image and imagination, and as Paul Virilio maintains, manifesting itself in even the very fabric of informatic networks of exchange[110]) is the only means to the ideality of a *pax globalis* where peace is maintained only in the continuation of war by other, ever-more spectacularized means, and producing a concept of violence in relation to power and politics that has become proper to spectacular society: violence in perpetuity *and* reserve, omnipresent *and* deferred, and in all cases subject to the arbitrary sovereign decision over when, where, and against whom it may be (admitted to be) used.

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[109] Hanssen, "On the Politics of Pure Means," 246-247.

[110] See particularly *Pure War*, where Virilio answers Sylvere Lotringer's summary question, "So Pure War corresponds to pure confrontation," with the summary statement, "Pure, technical, technocratic confrontation, of which [in the fallout of the Cold War and its enduring retrospective mythos] the Americans are the absolute symbol, the Soviets being only their emulators." (156; brackets mine) The concept of "Pure War," which is "not the kind which is declared," (27) is an "epistemo-technical" concept that comes to bear on how the field of the latter, with its essentially temporal compressions, elisions, and instantaneities, impacts the field of the former in such a way as to both force and herald "the end of a concept of politics based on dialogue, dialectic, time for reflection" (Lotringer) and the emergence of what Virilio calls "trans-politics." As he explains, with Bergsonian overtones and Deleuzian resonance, "Trans-politics is the beginning of the disappearance of politics in the dwindling of the last commodity: duration. Democracy, consultation, the basis of politics, requires time. Duration is the proper of man; he is inscribed within it. For me, trans-politics is the beginning of the end." (34)

Arendt, then, attacks those "old verities" less for their historically immanent truth-value (including whatever appeals to transcendence upon which they may rely) than for their practical and political applicability vis-à-vis the contemporary "indeterminately determined" relation between violence and power, their contradictorily univectorial causal path and, ultimately, devastating conflation of violence with the very category of power. The consequence of this uneasy singularization is a profound shift in the thought, practice, and practicality of violence as an instrument, expression, or extension of politics. As Hanssen surmises, this "aberrant instrumentality gone awry … announced the end of *all conventional, strategic* warfare, thus rendering the old dictum of war as the *ultima ratio* obsolete;"[111] in sum, staging a state of perpetual crisis which is less strategically unmanageable than infinitely politically productive in direct proportion to its capacity for destruction: violence as not only the virtualized undercurrent of an age, but as a *pure political means* that, to borrow Jameson's phrase, "seems to brook no utopian alternative" in terms of viable modes of counterviolence. Means to an end is no longer the case – rather, this is an age marked by a mode of production and power organized by a philosophy and a politics of pure and purely excessive means.

In the end, we can understand Arendt's topography as laying out less power and violence as antinomies and more as a dynamic conceptualization of two competing modalities *of* power, each actualized in different ways, but reaching the same end. The common conceptualization of power here is that which is actualized in politics, whereas violence is actualized in specific material acts, interventions and gestures. So, similar to Deleuze and Foucault, what in Arendt's view ultimately differentiates power from violence is precisely the intervention of a third force: politics, as a catalyst that simultaneously provides their alchemical fusion and the differential subjugation of violence to a mere instrumental means. In this, politics (as a pure mediality that is a means without end) autotelically and tautologically becomes its own false end, in the service of the power it perpetuates: the instrumentalization of one mediality precipitating and requiring the instrumentality of another (or perhaps more precisely, of the other that is its own, hidden condition of possibility).

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[111] Hanssen, "On the Politics of Pure Means," 247.

But politics is also the limit of violence for Arendt: if not external to or the other of violence, then at least its point of contact with its outside, the point at which, as Gourgouris has observed in the case of law, the limit becomes visible. Shoring up Derrida's indictment of all processes' complicity in a general economy of violence, as Arendt describes it, even peace – as the image of non-violence, of discourse, of politics in the most glorious Platonic/Aristotelian sense – is the continuation of war by other means, a deferral of an eventual (to say nothing of total) violence. In modifying Clausewitz's dictum, Arendt both makes clear that this modification was always inherent in it in the first place and, insofar as this modification was demanded in this particular moment of crisis, also makes clear that the image and actuality of violence operating here is one that has changed less in quality than in its degree of recognition and force of organization. The consequence is a catastrophe for the thought and potentiality of politics as an image of non-violence: if there can be no politics without violence, there can be no politics at all; if the means of politics have been appropriated and its potentialities expunged, no countermovement or counterviolence within the political can hope to gain traction.

This, of course, is the both the central paradox and inassailable strength of politically actualized power: it only exist as an image, as an empty set, but in this way its facticity and mystical appeals are all the more concentrated. Through its paradoxical dislocation and mislocution onto the external image of an/other, it in actuality cedes its power to its outside, against which it is always aggressively on the defensive. And while this is potentially disastrous in its consequences – as Debord rightfully observes of the larger pattern of processes of spectacularization and separation at stake, "once the running of a state involves a permanent and massive shortage of historical knowledge, that state can no longer be led strategically"[112] – the ideological spin-doctoring accompanying these processes, and particularly those at work to always and actively reframe the other and the relation thereto as spectacularities in their own right, is far more than often enough sufficient. And given the degree to which violence is categorically defined negatively by the dominant structure of politics itself, these political mediations are at once absolutely crucial and ultimately subordinate to the affirmative function of power: the violence it enacts cannot be witnessed as such, but rather must be externalized and concatenated around these external non-actors in what is, in essence, a *politics of distraction* coupled with a *politics of deferral* in the service of protecting its secreted and secreting core.

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[112] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 20.

And this, at base, is what Arendt's intervention attends: the instrumentalized face of violence, simultaneously always visible and never visible, always in motion but perpetually deferred, a violence necessarily of *pure means in a parody of the Benjaminian politics of counterviolence*. As Arendt argues, there is a foreseeable end to violence and the power that wields it, but this is an end that only power can afford; once

> violence is no longer backed and restrained by power, the well-known reversal in reckoning with means and ends has taken place. The means, the means of destruction, now determine the end – with the consequence that the end will be the destruction of all power.[113]

But while Arendt goes to great lengths to differentiate violence from power, force, and even politics as rationalist systems (however much these systems are always-already invested with a messianistic logic that entails a deferral of apocalyptic revelation) in order to demonstrate the fundamental irrationality of contemporary power and its means of violence, the radicality of her reframing comes at a cost. In resisting a full equation late capitalist power and violence, she symptomatically (and quite conservatively) holds the latter in conceptual reserve, replicating the former's generalized logic of deferral. And while the distinctions she makes between violence and power, force, and politics both problematize and affirm the degree to which we can accept Derrida's easy if ironized conflation of the force/violence dynamic in *Gewalt*, her focus on the essential instrumentality of violence is troublesome from a political perspective. For on the one hand, violence in the atomic age is simultaneously a means to an end (the weapon of a degraded politics, inimical to communication and expression) and a means without end (a threat lorded over the world entire under a totalizing, unifying politics of deferral), and in either case always instrumentally in service of power as an end in itself (and, in light of the apocalyptic violence of global nuclear war toward which these politics drive, the end *of* itself). The indeterminacies and irrationalities of this scenario would seem to be such that would offer up the greatest of instabilities on the part of power, the greatest potentials for a truly political counterviolence, and this indeed seems to be the gesture at the heart of her text. But on the other hand, the way in which she describes this totalitarian politics of pure means on the side of the state puts into question the possibility for any systemic dynamism and, for that matter, any counterviolence against it (violence as the tool of power and power alone, on a total scale and with no outside).

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[113] Arendt, *On Violence*, 54.

For these reasons, as Hanssen argues in "On the Politics of Pure Means," Arendt's reframing of the political problem of violence is at the same time productive and reductive. Certainly, Arendt manages to productively problematize those relations that are seemingly peripheral to the imaginary "problem of violence" by recalling and reframing the aporia of violence and power in the context of their coincident absolute visibility, wherein the irrationality of power and the political utility of violence are both laid bare. This gives Arendt the occasion to critique precisely what Derrida has isolated as the heart of the occidental problem of violence: the simultaneously localized and generalized relation between Self and Other. "The postwar malaise," Hanssen notes,

> provided her an occasion to analyze the liberal-democratic mode of power. Contemporary political thought seemed to be marked by a confusion of power with violence, of *potestas* with *violentia*, she argued, because it equated power with coercion...which according to Arendt limited the concept of power to 'the power of man over man.'[114]

To separate power and violence, Arendt makes a qualified distinction: power, like peace, was defined in Kantian terms as "an absolute or pure *Ziel* (end)," while violence, "which always needs instruments, [was defined as] instrumental."[115] A traditionalist enough perspective, but the consequences entail a more curious twist: violence, as an instrument, is positioned as supremely rational (contra the prevailing logic of violence as inherently irrational), while power, in its reliance on violence and violence alone to sustain itself, is consequently fully irrational (as the means by which it sustained itself would, if carried through, entail its end).

But Hanssen finds in Arendt's ultimate instrumentalization of violence a final folding of the hand to the political potentiality of violence that marked the moment (and indeed the content) of her writing. In essence, Hanssen claims, by ultimately reducing violence to a mere instrument of power that can have no salubrious political implementation, Arendt both defuses the political potentials of counterviolence and violence alike, and at the same time relegates violence to that same vicious cycle of means and ends she protests in her reformulation of Clausewitz's dictum. Following Habermas and Negt, what Hanssen takes issue with is Arendt's Aristotelian concept of politics, which as defined by communicative action and dialogue (in essence, a politics of pure means) is essentially separate from violence (as an instrumental means to an absolute end), "thus reducing politics to a pristine, violence-free realm."[116] The consequence of this "reduction" is twofold for Hanssen: first (per Habermas' critique), to remove politics from violence is to separate politics of less-than-ideal varieties from the operations of social, economic, and ideological apparatuses, which consequently is to ignore the structural violences those apparatuses and their operations sustain; second (per Negt's critique), to remove violence from politics is to require "a rejection of all forms of 'counterviolence' (*Gegengewalt*), which are seen as the glorification of violence, its anti- or even non-political justification."[117] Consequently, Arendt is seen to reinscribe the very liberal-democratic model she sought to upend (and saw the contemporary face of violence and power to upend), as well as the means-ends relationship, which while problematized in her writing remains intact as the fundament for her theory.

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[114] Hanssen, "On the Politics of Pure Means," 247-248.
[115] Hanssen, "On the Politics of Pure Means," 248. Brackets mine.

But with due deference to the clarity and validity of Hanssen's critique, one must question its applicability given the slippery rhetoric of Arendt's treatise, a text that is simultaneously descriptive, prescriptive, and symptomatic of the fundamental indeterminacies carried with the late-capitalist moment. Given the situation at hand in the integrated spectacle (a situation that is not necessarily as overwhelmingly paralyzing and dire as Debord suggests nor, pace Hanssen, as open for the play and resistance of heterogeneic forces as others might claim), if one attends Arendt's diagnosis of the state of violence as precisely that – a *diagnosis*, heuristically made with the tools at hand – the truer nature and fuller urgency of her political, interventionary, and indeed even revolutionary end is more apparent. In essence, her most seemingly dystopian moment of description is both motivated by and gives way to a utopian vision and transformative impulse that could equally be read as a gesture toward, not away from, praxis. Indeed, perhaps the most terrifying conclusion to entertain is that Arendt's ultimate "return" in her reframing to what would seem a simpler and more restricted sense of the instrumentality of violence opposed to the *potenza* of politics is that, instead of this maneuver being part and parcel with a generalized extremist nihilism and nostalgic backpedaling that one might expect within the parameters of thought afforded in the postmodern, she is, at base, absolutely *correct*: her instrumental diagnosis in its own way conscribed within the thought of immanence, and despairing in the very real dearth of avenues to create or occupy such modes of existence or resistance that do anything but succumb to or replicate those already permitted and in place.

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[116] Hanssen, "On the Politics of Pure Means," 249. Hanssen here refers to Arendt's 1963 *On Revolution*, where she makes what would seem to be the absolutely proper and sensible claim that "violence itself is incapable of speech," for "where violence rules absolutely, as for instance in the concentration camps of totalitarian regimes, not only the laws … but everything and everybody must fall silent." (as cited in Hanssen, 248) Inasmuch as she equates violence with monology, Arendt is fundamentally correct in these statements, but each is incomplete in its own way: the first ignores the interpellative and enunciative qualities of subjectivation-qua-violence (a point elaborated by Butler, above), and the second fails to account for the fact that, when it comes to violence, the law is less "silent" than suspended, "speaking from and as its absence," as it were (a point elaborated by Agamben, below). In either case, these incomplete formulations indeed support Hanssen's specific critique that Arendt paints herself out of the corner of having to acknowledge structural violences, and particularly by way of Derrida's general critique that all of human affairs – ideal-Aristotelian politics included – participates in the general economy of violence.

[117] Hanssen, "On the Politics of Pure Means," 249.

From the standpoint of a critique of late capitalism and the spectacle, we can understand Arendt's focus on the pervasive instrumentality of contemporary violence as one strategically and ultimately immanently linked to how spectacular society's problematizations of the means-ends relation are of a piece with its pervasive reifications. Jameson, perhaps most directly, provides the bridge in "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture":

> The theory of reification (here strongly overlaid with Max Weber's analysis of rationalization) describes the way in which, under capitalism, the older traditional forms of human activity are instrumentally reorganized and 'taylorized,' analytically fragmented and reconstructed according to various rational models of efficiency, and essentially restructured along the line of a differentiation between means and ends. This is a paradoxical idea: it cannot be properly appreciated until it is understood to what degree the means/ends split effectively brackets or suspends ends themselves, hence the strategic value of the Frankfurt School term 'instrumentalization' which usefully foregrounds the organization of the means themselves over against any particular end or value which is assigned to their practice. In traditional activity, in other words, the value of the activity is immanent to it, and qualitatively distinct from other ends or values articulated in other forms of work or play.[118]

Always necessarily enunciated and understood within the movement of historical and discursive forces organized under a prevailing mode of production, the "problem of violence" today is and should be understood as *precisely* the problem of its full instrumentalization to the ends of power, an end that always-already and necessarily entails more and more violence in more and more insidious and pervasive forms as a matter of its own logic and operations, however irrational they may be. This is Arendt's diagnosis, and the problem ultimately to no small degree lies within the state's "other" weapon: the spectacle, its fields of visibility, its economy and excesses, and moreover its intimacy with and categorically transformative force upon the political as a field of mediality and potentiality, rendering all politics as politics of pure means without revolutionary end (in other words, the spectacle's tendential foreclosure of praxis itself as a decisive counterviolence: under its instrumental politics of separation, the wheels of thought may spin but have difficulty gaining traction on the slick and shifting road, and in any case that road leads forever and nowhere).

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[118] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 10.

Hanssen's critique of Arendt's understanding of the means-ends relationship vis-à-vis violence, politics, and power might thus be better situated in our current context as indicative of a more substantive crisis: that of the means-ends relation itself, how the very verities of this relation themselves are immanently contradictory in ways that absolutely inform, and to an extent validate, Arendt's claims and critiques. This relation is and can perhaps only be negotiated in the sphere of politics which Hanssen (rightly or wrongly) accuses Arendt of eliding and foreclosing in her treatise. In other words, what has most fundamentally been transformed in the "new age of violence" Arendt diagnoses is not necessarily violence "itself" (as a proprietary instrument of power in reserve, and its structurally necessary and nearly-always-invisible enactments by terms of unequal, unanswered, or monologically unanswerable exchange), nor necessarily the means and ends of its instrumentalization (as accordant with the very notion that such a relationship is guaranteed in right), but rather a shift in scope, scale, or instrumental status of violence vis-à-vis politics, a shift in the very ways in which its instrumentalization is justified and situated to maintain the imaginary *of* justification in the (perhaps also imaginary) means-ends relation, of the very validity of the relation itself, and concomitantly a fundamental violence to the more abstract appeals this relation entails (justice, defense, sovereignty, and agency in the very determination of the Self). Once and again, it is not violence per se that is really at stake here, but rather the forces by which it is capable of being mobilized, registered, understood, and accepted, and the problem of violence at least as much in the crises of the means power has at its disposal as in the crises of its means of apprehension and justification.

This latter problematic is what concerns Giorgio Agamben in *Means Without End.* Distilling and extending his more expansive discourse in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* on the intersections of sovereignty, politics, and violence into Debordian territory, what Agamben articulates most strongly in this work is that the spectacle's coming-into-dominance entails that very "worst violence" Derrida discusses: the foreclosure of the expressive and performative qualities of linguistic discourse and politics, their transubstantiation into simulacra of the same (the spectacle, the image). For Agamben, this threatens the foreclosure of the productivity of politics, even the end of politics *tout court.* Agamben shares with Arendt and Benjamin a neo-Aristotelian understanding of politics as a communicative and communitarian mediality that rebuffs instrumental determinism: "*Politics is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the act of making a means visible as such.*"[119] But the ideality of these "pure means" – to evoke a crucial but unremarked-upon aside in Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" – always carries within itself the very means for its own instrumentalization: as Benjamin remarks of the figure of the diplomat that embodies this ideality, "(f)undamentally they have, entirely on the analogy of agreement between private persons, to resolve conflicts case by case, in the names of their states, peacefully and without contracts ... beyond all legal systems, and therefore beyond violence"[120]: in other words, the very image of contemporary sovereignty, its arbitrariness "beyond law," but certainly not "beyond violence."

Like Arendt, Agamben sees in late capitalism the end of politics as we know it, but his take on these matters helps put Arendt's despairing critique (and Hanssen's critique thereof) in a more lucid perspective. As Agamben explains, while "we encounter our own linguistic nature inverted" in this mode of politics marked by "the terminal expropriation of language carried out by the spectacular state," for all the spectacle's saturated and ironically alienating means of communicability, "the spectacle still contains something like a positive possibility..."[121] At once a parody and a pure expression of politics, the embrace of the spectacle's pure mediality in fact allows for the emergence of politics in its ownmost form as mediation and mediality not as an inassailable or unrecognizable transparency, but rather, by its own immanent logic, simultaneously on display. In this way, we might better recognize in Arendt's ostensible foreclosure of the productivity of politics precisely the same revelatory lacuna that Jameson finds in the *most* egregious affirmative-ideological mechanisms of mass culture: divorced from means of linguistic command and pushed into the indeterminacies of the spectacular and its base unit of exchange, the image, a new politics may emerge and as such new relations to sovereignty, to right, to life, and thus, ultimately, to violence.

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[119] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 116. Emphases his.
[120] Benjamin, *Reflections*, 293.
[121] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 115.

Still, the inversion of linguistic nature Agamben speaks of one that necessarily leads to the image – i.e., the inverse of communicability – and hence, per Arendt and Derrida, to violence (as both the incommunicable, or the limit of communicability, and the other of discourse, that is, silence and silencing as both the manifestation and consequence of "the worst violence"). In this light, we can certainly understand the importance of Derrida's call to vigilance in his condemnations of the violence of the hegemony of ocularcentrism. The greatest and worst violence here is precisely that ocularcentric ontology – from the subject to philosophy – demands a determinate blinding to an out of field that is infinitely vaster than the frame, a turning away through the inversion of language that the image requires: the *oculum imperfectae* of reason, of science, of phenomenology, of light itself can only comprehend that upon which their limited wavelengths are designed and permitted to reflect. Indeed, the intrinsic violence of the spectacle is such that it forces Agamben, clearly echoing Arendt, to put forth that "(t)he concepts of *sovereignty* and *constituent power*, which are at the core of our political tradition, have to be abandoned or, at least, to be thought all over again."[122] With these violences to the very categories through which violence "itself" is so commonly understood and justified, a potentially cataclysmic indiscernibility arises as violence and the notion of sovereignty that guarantees its just exercise are not simply relationally inverted – that is, violence now guaranteeing the justness of sovereignty and power, as is Arendt's maxim – but fundamentally atomized and dispersed, disappearing into the very fabric of relations, tightly woven but fraying at the edges.

For Agamben, sovereignty is today comprehensible only in relation to the politicization of the "naked life" it takes as its both its object and its ultimate field of justification. In ways that recall and intensify Derrida's admonition of ocularcentric politics' transubstantiation of matter into pure form, the politicization of the *bare matter* of naked life precipitates a *new form of biopolitical life* he calls "homo sacer": "life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed." Agamben articulates this figure in relation to a structure and logic of sovereign power dependent not on universal validations (say, of the inalienable right to life as such), but rather in a structure of the arbitrary decision and exception. The sphere of sovereign decision, "a limit sphere of human action that is only ever maintained in a relation of exception," suspends law in the state of exception "and thus implicates bare life within it."[123] Both the condition and the consequence of sovereign power, homo sacer

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[122] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 112.

> presents the originary figure of life taken in to the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the *political* dimension was first constituted. The political sphere of sovereignty was thus constituted through a double exclusion, as an excrescence of the profane in the religious and of the religious in the profane, which takes the form of a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide. *The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing a crime and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere.*[124]

This explicates (or begins to explicate) the formal structure of the exception: homo sacer is captured in the sovereign ban, and is "the life that constitutes the first content of sovereign power."[125] It also poses a "structural analogy between the sovereign exception and *sacratio*,"[126] which answers Benjamin's problematically unanswered question regarding "the origin of the dogma of the sacredness of life"[127] that is the basis for the justification for the violence of law in the following way:

> The life caught in the sovereign ban is the life that is originally sacred – that is, that may be killed but not sacrificed – and, in this sense, the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty. The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment.[128]

And this brings us, as it does Agamben, to the political:

> The sovereign and homo sacer are joined in the figure of an action that, excepting itself from both human and divine law, from both *nomos* and *physis*, nevertheless

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[123] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 83.
[124] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 83.
[125] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 83.
[126] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 84.
[127] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 83.
[128] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 83.

> delimits what is, in a certain sense, the first properly political space of the West distinct from both the religious and profane sphere, from both the natural order and the regular, juridicial order.[129]

The "proximity between the sphere of sovereignty and the sphere of the sacred" is *not* the "secularized residue" of political power's originary religious character, nor the attempt to give political power a religious foundation (and hence divine justification). Rather, "sacredness is the originary form of the inclusion of bare life in the juridicial order, and the syntagm homo sacer names something like the originary 'political' relation, which is to say, bare life insofar as it operates in an inclusive exclusion as the referent of the sovereign decision," which consequently means that "life is sacred only insofar as it is taken into the sovereign exception."[130]

It is thus that, as Agamben says in "Notes on Politics" (and in a way that clearly recalls Foucault's admonitions), sovereignty today is the alibi for the worst violence against naked life, with no law save that which it decides in its own favor and on its own terms:

> Sovereignty ... is the guardian who prevents the undecidable threshold between violence and right, nature and language, from coming to light. We have to fix our gaze, instead, precisely on what the statue of Justice ... was not supposed to see, namely, what nowadays is apparent to everybody: that *the state of exception is the rule*, that naked life is immediately the carrier of the sovereign nexus, and that, as such, it is today abandoned to a kind of violence that is all the more effective for being anonymous and quotidian.[131]

This state of exception is thus notable for its suspension of traditional notions of sovereignty qua determining and indeterminate nexus between law and its nominal other, violence. The space of the concentration camp emblematizes the provisional lawlessness that is the "*nomos* of the modern," where sovereign power, in practice and categorically, runs roughshod over its own constraints, revealing the will *to* violence as integral to sovereign power. And in its unapologetic transparency, the state of exception also opens upon a space in which a "coming community" of progressive social movements or thought can bring about a denial of this spurious spectacular sovereignty that would undo it without possibility of return.

Certainly, the spectacle is more than well-equipped to divert or rein in these potentialities, taking them at their constitution but, in subjecting them to its economy as a condition of their inclusion, directing them to ends that are not theirs. Arendt, to an extent, recognizes this: violence *is* for her a political problem precisely because it exceeds mediality in its unilateral and instrumentally determinate im-mediacy, and it *is* in this sense the fundamental limit of politics as such. Still, the immediacy (or sense thereof) ascribed to violence is as much as anything a condition and coextension of its habitation in the (always-politicized) visible, which in its own way is the apotheosis of politics as a pure mediality. This complicates not only her antinomic positioning of violence and politics, but also her most basic characterization of violence as an instrumental means of power subordinated to an end: the "end" she describes is not a finality but the continuation of the exercise of power through the endless display and deployment of means, but at the same time the means *are* the end (no power without violence, but every bit as certainly no violence without power).

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[129] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 84.
[130] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 84-85.
[131] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 113.

The aporetic is familiar: the tension that Arendt isolates is precisely the Levinasian paradox of determinate constitution vis-à-vis power to begin with: power can only exist in the presence of an other which the former posits as such, and thus externalized, power only exists in and as that other. The true locus power is less in the merely or simply unseen or absent but in the actively and concertedly unvisualized or denigrated, and the task of the outward face of power is to sublimate that externalized power into the force of fear, thereby always-already stacking the deck in its favor, guaranteeing itself in perpetuity. This is the terrible logic of force and violence alike in late capitalism, the conditions under at which they *can* – indeed are *permitted to* – fully be thought *as* alike: means to more means, means as the condition for more means; an expansive axiomatic economy that, as we have already suggested, reflects upon and sustains the logic of their common base: capitalism itself. Unable to operate on its own steam (it has none of its own, anyway, save for its hot air), the burden of labor is shifted onto institutional apparatuses – particularly sites of image-production and dissemination – and ultimately onto the living images of the other and the selves they dialectically inscribe. For politics (and politically actualized power) can only exist through what politics is, at base, all about: mediation and mediality, *images*, and today *simulacra* of power that in this transfinite space substitute for power itself, proliferating without end.

The hazy intersection of politics and phenomenality that marks Arendt's intervention into the contemporary thought of violence also marks another point of relative indiscernibility, a double gesture on Arendt's part as well: the display of power that both is and is not equated with violence, and more, the point at which power becomes violence by means of its visibility in spectacular society. In the landscape of Debord's integrated spectacle, a topos suffused with and defined by a pervasive and globalized violence that becomes the substitute for power itself as this latter's visible, active, and ultimately political display, the effects are not just additive but exponential, as various fields of force intersect and direct themselves at the simultaneously bewildered and mesmerized subjectivities they inaugurate: the violence of spectacular society's general economy of violence multiplied by the violence of images multiplied by the violence to violence embedded within the violent imaginary that sustains this economy in the increasingly totalitarian late-twentieth century geopolis. What we might then add to Agamben's above statements regarding the potentialities of the spectacle is that while the visible is a polyvalent and somewhat "neutral" territory of pure mediality (even permitting the making-visible of that mediality), when it comes to the exercise of power there is a difference between making a means *visible as such* (the positive potentiality of transparency: revelation) and making them *legible as what they are not* (the politics of separation and displacement inhering in the sovereign decision and spectacular relations).

"VIOLENCE 'IS'…": ANSWERING TO THE QUESTION & THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE TASK

Drawing on the perspectives we have been occupying and the propositions we have extended in this incomplete exercise of talking "about" violence, we might close with a set, however itself incomplete, of notions adequate to answering to our originary question. By the irreducibly aporetic and always-provisional terms of the violent imaginary, violence "is":

- Both connected with and considered as the other, a context that is inherently (and for the most part productively) antagonistic, adversarial, and aporetic;
- Both the antithesis of reason and rationality and the inevitable product and consequence of their absence;
- An arbitrary and unanticipated interruption or irruption of continuity or order, hence a problem that must needs be solved or deferred, even if by "counterviolence," to restore or maintain that continuity or order;
- Bound up in (and, to an extent, necessary for the contemporary expression and understanding of) cause and effect, autonomy and agency, intentionality and will, instruments and instrumentality, means and ends;
- Justified when used as means to an end that, vis-à-vis the transcendental categories informing the Western liberal-democratic image of law, is considered "pure," and none more so than the defense or maintenance of the Self, identity, and the sovereign right of self-determination;
- Recognized as such when the means, ends, causes and effects are visible or can otherwise be accommodated to ocularcentric epistemology;
- Absolutely, categorically, but always provisionally differentiated from force or "necessary," "nonviolent" relations of forces (e.g., political action and attacks, local and global economic and hence sociocultural inequities, the "natural course and order of things," and so forth).

Violence is most commonly framed, then, as an empirical and phenomenal matter, in terms of *facticity* and as a *problem.* When an act or relation is named or understood as violence, its justifications (including the justifications for that naming or understanding) are inherently political, provisional, arbitrary, and contradictory – though they are often *taken* as transcendental or natural, and reconciled as such vis-à-vis essentially narratological structures and appeals. In this, and quite contrary to its unilaterally negative framing, violence is also *necessary for* and *integral to* progress and development – if by these terms we mean the eschatological overcoming of obstacles toward a "more perfect end" – and in its continuing presence guarantees an endless procession of further problems to be solved, in the interest of maintaining and guaranteeing already-established systems of meaning and power, deferring all ends and finality unto infinity. It is thus also a driving force that for reasons equally of political and structural exigency *cannot*, by its current terms and forms, be "done away with" in any form or by any means.

The absolute primacy of visibility to the knowledge of violence – its defining empirical effects, identifiable actors, recognizable instruments, and so forth – as much reveals the degree to which violence is of an integral piece with our mode of existence as distracts us from considering structural or systemic violence. The paradox of a time where "everything is visible" that even more is not is no less true of the violence within, and of, such an arrangement. Because violence is substantively connected to the means and categories by which we think ourselves and the world, this is a political and discursive problem with underlying interests and a key determinant of our very mode of existence; but in spectacular society, its aporetic qualities are sufficiently resolved in the domain of the image, by way of an overdetermined coordination of spectacular processes and effects.

If power is today (rightly or wrongly) equated with the ability to do violence, and if consequently, to paraphrase Arendt, politics (as the dialogical negotiation of power relations and knowledge) and even the peace it represents (insofar as rational dialogue and negotiation are considered in the sphere of the nonviolent, the absence of violence) are now "the continuation of war by other means," the supposed "ends" of violence (peace, order, stability, economistic equity) are now the same as its means. In other words, if the object of power is to be maintained and strengthened, and its means to this end are the violence which purportedly needs to be overcome, power today is manifest merely as the maintenance of a certain threat of violence, as the power over life maintained by the constant enactment of certain kinds of violence that apocryphally fall outside our frames of recognizing what violence "is" while holding this latter and all decisions coming to bear upon its image in reserve.

And ultimately, if violence is now the common denominator in all lived and thought relations, we are all both victims and perpetrators of certain violences that cannot be permitted to be named as such: economic relations, social stratifications, environmental abuse, unreflective consumption, and finally the violence to meaning, truth and action that spectacular society operates on and inflicts on us, which we extend by accepting its terms and its violence. The "general economy of violence" is such that it permeates the totality of lived, felt, and thought relations: it reflects and sustains our mode of production, it defines and determines our very mode of existence.

In response to and with regard for these miasmas, we might posit a "praxical definition" of violence loosely comprehended by the following axioms:

AXIOM I: Violence is neither singular nor determinate, but rather *irreducibly aporetic* and *a pure locus of indeterminacy*: to deny these qualities in its consideration is to do an undue violence to violence, as is to deny these in its *mode* of consideration.

AXIOM II: Given its quality as both the result and the precondition for all determining relations, to consider violence meaningfully, and indeed even to speak of it at all, requires something of a surrender to its terms: not as a foreclosure of resistance, but as a necessary acknowledgement of debt to the concept as such. This requires *turning away from* transcendental categories, embracing and owning up to an ethics of immanence as the precondition for such a meaningful consideration and inquiry. At the same time, nothing of the imaginaries which always-already accompany violence – including their appeals to transcendental categories – can be *discarded* out of hand: it is in these that the violent imaginary functions conceptually and materially, and as such they constitute vital points of contention and the precondition for any such intervention to proceed. To discard them would be to politically invalidate the critique at best, an act of bad faith at worst.

AXIOM III: While fundamental and intrinsic to discourse, the "worst violence" arises from the failure or putting to death of discourse: its silencing, silence itself. In spectacular society, this discourse is manifest in the violence of light which both facilitates and forecloses our knowledge of violence, while at the same time tendentially foreclosing the possibility of discourse: in other terms, it is the *execution* of discourse, doubly articulated. Engaging in and with this war of light is thus both unavoidable and necessary.

AXIOM IV: Monology is the absolute articulative principle of violence: where one is manifest or active, so the other. Dialogue, while inextricable from its own violences and complicit in the economy of violence that enables the thought of each, does not dispel violence, but constitutes both a structure and an image of economic equity that mediates this principle. And this, of course, is also politically appropriable to ends of violence.

AXIOM V: In its monological character, operative separations and displacements, and substantive transparency, the conditions of the spectacle extend and reveal a fundamental quality of violence always inherent from its positing as an originary force. As such, the violence of the spectacle is *apocryphal*: an inclusive exclusion, it is occulted, hidden, authorless, and hence, with the violent imaginary's renderings of violence as legible, visible, and agential, *apparently* non-violent. The ethical task of any critique of violence is to move from apocrypha, through aporias, to apocalypse.

AXIOM VI: Regardless of its visible, empirical, or phenomenological qualities, and moreover independently of the visibility or localization of agents and effects, violence is manifest in and manifests itself as (an) asymmetrical or unequal exchange, and is differentiated (and differentiatable) from "force" only to the extent that it meets inclusive criteria of justification (based in the image of economic equity) set forth by law. Empirical violence both is and reveals the limit of law: its visibility both essential and anathema to its ends.

AXIOM VII: Vis-à-vis the economy of violence and the limits of the violent imaginary (as both a form and support of that economy, of law), their enabling definitional and conceptual structures are not purely or primarily axiomatic and inclusive: they are equally and at the same time ones of exception and exclusion. As such, its operations are as much a matter of accommodating excesses by adding new axioms as of making exceptions to its own axioms (be it by modifying, denying, or turning away from them). In other words, these are structures, operating by tactical and strategic means, of exclusion, exception, and accommodation that nonetheless cannot fully comprehend their "object," which both exceeds and derives from them. It is thus not only coordinate with, but an operative coextension of, the infinitely (self-re)productive and self-preservative logic of the spectacle as a structure that encompasses, enables, and extends sovereign power – and is subject to the same immanent scotomae, fissures, limits, and productive potentialities.

AXIOM VIII: Given the preceding axioms, we return to and supplement the first: any consideration of this structure must also be prepared to not only add new axioms in response to the development and heterogeneity of historical formations and their strata of statements and visibilities, but also to make necessary exceptions as a matter of both discursive strategy and responsibility to the simultaneously determinate and indeterminate, destructive and productive qualities of violence. Per Derrida, repetition without difference – that is, the failure and death of discourse – is the worst violence, against which we *must* be vigilant.

The mode of existence fostered under late capitalism puts us in the frame of each and all: the spectacle, the images it arranges, and our relation to those images represents the dominant, total, and seemingly objective model by and through which the totality of the world is made legible, and constitutes a monologic discourse that acts upon and through us, fundamentally transforming the very essence of life, experience, action, thought, and understanding – to say nothing of "violence," how it is understood, enacted, and accepted. In this regard, ours is all the more so an "age of violence," with the violent imaginary, a product and active, enabling mechanism of spectacularized relations and their underlying mode of production, doing what Williams and Derrida alike consider to be the ultimate violence: "doing violence to violence" conceptually and definitively, but always ready and able to change its terms. And the cinema, as the following chapters will work to demonstrate, is not only a part of these systemically violent processes, but an analogical, emblematic model by which we can understand their functions and formations.

CHAPTER TWO
A VIOLENT MACHINE?

The cinema is a peculiarly violent form of entertainment, developing in and catering for what we have come to think of as an age of violence. (...) Of all aspects of the cinema, the treatment of violence is perhaps the most complex, and in many ways central. (...) The Oxford English Dictionary defines the primary meaning of violence as 'the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons or property', and this, the generally understood meaning in everyday life ... shows how close the cinema is to violence in real life that one can discuss the widest possible range of films in these terms...[1]

Philip French
"Violence in the Cinema"

As we embrace, endure, or resist the effects of the digital, the cinematic still remains the sensorial dominant of this century, of a modernity defined by mass production, mass consumption, and mass destruction.[2]

Miriam Bratu Hansen

(T)he origins of an art reveal something of its nature...[3]

André Bazin
"The Myth of Total Cinema"

PREFACE:
QUANTITIES AND QUALITIES (REDUX)

It is easy enough to make the objective, empirical claim that not only contemporary Hollywood cinema, but indeed the cinema in general, across its variegated history, has long been suffused and even obsessed with violence. From the very moment of its emergence, the medium turned its incipiently static and monocular gaze toward scenes of destruction (Bros. Lumière, *Demolition of a Wall*, 1895), beatings framed as slapstick (Bros. Lumière, *The Sprinkler Sprinkled*, 1895; Edison, *Glenroy Brothers (Comic Boxing)*, 1894), the seedy cruelty of subterranean, unsanctioned entertainments (Edison, *Cock Fight*, 1896), the spectacular potential for bodily harm posed by the emerging modern technologies and socio-cultural conditions of urban industrial modernity (Hepworth Mfg. Co., *How it Feels to be Run Over* and *Explosion of a Motor Car*, 1900; R.W. Paul, *Extraordinary Cab Accident*, 1903), and even the chillingly objective, real-time documentation of the actual, lethal effects of those technologies on living organisms (Edison, *Electrocuting an Elephant*, 1903). Developing and evolving as the medium developed and evolved, this evident fascination with and compulsion to present the spectacular and violent persisted and deepened, flourishing all the more in early and emerging narrative texts: from the grisly beheading culminating *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots* (Edison Company, 1893) to the theatrically episodic (and literally explosive) confrontations with alien entities comprising the entire third act of Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la lune,* 1902), to finally a structurally integral position, organizing and advancing the narrative itself in what was (and in many ways remains) the archetypically American *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter, 1903). Markedly and at a remarkable pace, violence – or at the very least, empirical acts and effects of violence, if for the greatest part simulated – quickly and clearly became the fundament upon and through which the very movement of, and spectator's engagement with, cinematic narratives was cemented: as spectacular, seductive, and ultimately structurally necessary points of anticipation, fascination, and propulsion.

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[1] French, "Violence in the Cinema," 59 & 69.
[2] Hansen, Introduction, xxxv.
[3] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol.I*, 21.

To be sure, this evident obsession, this preponderance of violence as not merely ancillary or supplementary to certain kinds of cinematic texts but as a kind of unifying constant – in short, *this necessity for the violent in the cinema* – has persisted and deepened from these initial castings of the medium's textual die, and never without an equally marked degree of concern and controversy over the quantity, quality, and potential use-value and effects of such representations. Vis-à-vis contemporary Hollywood cinema, the documentation of both the quantity and kind of violent acts has become something of a cottage industry, with various governmental agencies, alongside innumerable research and public interest groups, estimating the occurrences of "violent acts" in any given year of Hollywood production alone to number well into the thousands.[4] And just as certainly, the obsessive character of this accounting and cataloging is matched only by the public obsession with such material, demanding and receiving more and more of the same.

In this chapter, I would like to explore these empirically and phenomenally self-evident obsessions through and beyond the quantitative and quantifiable in order to establish a set of *qualitative* relations between contemporary Hollywood cinema – and to a certain extent, the cinema in general – and violence. This relation, I would like to suggest, includes but extends beyond French's generalized notion of the cinema as "a violent form of entertainment" understood in more or less purely empirical terms, and moreover far beyond the presence (and even "effects," in the broadest sense) within the medium's stock vocabulary of those representations and reinflections proprietary to the violent imaginary, that catalogue of acts and actors that find in the discourse of violence their limited yet definitive and meaningful form and constitution, and within the terms of which this cinema holds such a privileged, functionally integral position.[5] Framing the discussion on those grounds keeps us not only in the terrain of the quantitative and taxonomic (and hence in direct complicity with the violent imaginary), but more fundamentally spinning our wheels within the limited quantitative and qualitative questions of violence *in* the cinema French has noted that prevent us from asking more productive questions regarding the violence *of* the cinema. Attending these latter questions will provide with far more than a reiterative taxonomy of the obvious: it will permit us to understand how (and why) these concepts and their frames of interrogation not only correlate to one another, but absolutely coincide. The questions of violence "in" and "of" the cinema are ultimately the same question, but to understand this we must also appreciate that while the cinema surely shapes our knowledge of and relation to violence, it is equally the case that the reverse of this statement is also true: that our knowledge of and relation to violence, whatever it may or could be, shapes (and can reshape) our relation to and knowledge of "the cinema."

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[4] Even by these limited terms, however, the various definitional schemes used by these varying groups as to what constitutes a violent act do little to provide even an accurate quantitative number: the terms of definition and consequent enumerations provided by the Christian-conservative watchdog group Focus on the Family are different from those provided by the FCC, which are further different in kind and quantity from those provided by a popular corporate publication like Time-Warner's *Entertainment Weekly*, which keeps an exhaustive weekly tally of the thousands of deaths (presented or inferred) in summer blockbusters.

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[5] Given the mutually dependent relation between the cinema, as an apparatus still so central to spectacular society's economy of images, and the violent imaginary inculcated in and by the latter, the operational order of primacy noted in the introduction must be reasserted here. While the cinema fundamentally informs the course of the violent imaginary (in ways both specific to the medium and in concerted relation with the greater totality of contemporary image-discourse and -culture), it by no means precedes or predates the latter categorically. Rather, the cinema enters into the field of preexisting codes and knowledge which constitute the violent imaginary, "in medias res," and in ways that extend, accommodate, and attenuate its terms to the demands of its contemporary social context (be these for good or ill), but in so doing also introduces dangerous elements – the potential for "revealing too much" in its excesses of visibility and visualization, for example – which tendentially work to undercut the transparent naturality of the violent imaginary (if not always, of course, the imaginary which every film qua film itself establishes). However, the violent imaginary axiomatically adapts (if not always perfectly or completely, as per Gödel's incompleteness theorem of sets and systems) to these elements, and indeed in ways that are facilitated by the conditions of this particular medium. Thus, the cinema does not substantively or necessarily change the character or function of the violent imaginary, and certainly does not "(re)inaugurate" it; rather, the cinema opens up that imaginary in and for its time and place, while retaining and revealing what was already there to begin with.

If, as we have suggested to this point, the thought and knowledge of violence entails and even forces a consideration of origins and essences (the Levinasian/Derridean notion of violence as transcendental origin and originary aporia), I would like to posit that there is more to this cinematic/spectatorial obsession with the violent than historical happenstance, ideological utility, or even profit principles, however crucial to the overall equation these each are. Rather, what is fundamentally at stake here is an *ontological* relation between the cinema and violence that can be understood at the level of the functions and mechanics of the apparatus itself, that has persisted relatively unchanged from the dawn of the medium and the conditions of possibility (themselves, too, relatively unchanged in kind, if not degree) which permitted and necessitated that emergence, and, ultimately, that *precedes and preconditions* the cinema's general ability and consequent compulsions to represent, attend, and even enact violence. This relation is purely qualitative, and is marked (to surely put into play terminology that may be too metaphysically essentializing for comfort) by the respective essences of the medium and its most favored "object": on the one hand, the constitutive and procedural visibility, affectation, subjectivization, force, monology, and ambivalent indeterminacy that mark "the cinema" and "violence" alike and in kind, and on the other hand subsequent and supplementary techniques and strategies of exclusion, exception, and accommodation that mark the violent imaginary and its ideological-discursive correlation with the commercial narrative film. It is my conviction that, in the end, the cinema can rightly be understood as a preeminently violent machine to its very core – violent not only in the sense that its corpus of texts are often mere repositories for all things violent, but moreover in its very functions and operations – and that the cinema perhaps most clearly articulates its privileged relation to the conditions of our modernity precisely in its relation to and mediation of the violences that shoot through and structure each.

In order to explore the cinema's expansive, constitutional, and ultimately *functional* relation to violence (and, in the same movement, also to its limited imaginary), we might trace out three intertwining paths, each with their own consequences and considerations. To begin, we can examine the cinema's general *aptitude for* and *affinity with* violence: how the cinema is particularly amenable and ideally suited to being put in the service of reframing and re/presenting empirically violent phenomena of all types and scales, how such material can consequently be understood as "properly cinematic," and how this mutual attraction and determination opens on questions of ontologically-determined affinities between the apparatus and such phenomena. From this, we can better examine the *integrality* of violence to the medium itself, with an eye toward understanding the representational, conceptual, and even material violence of the cinema vis-à-vis both its subjects and subject matter: the functions of the cinematic apparatus – its objectivizing, arresting, and ruthlessly formative relation to the profilmic world, which extends with equal force to the subject of its discourse – suggesting that the cinema's affinity with the violent is not limited simply to the production and reproduction of objectivizing and externalizing representations to concerted political, epistemological, or affective ends, but that the medium itself is *intrinsically instrumentally* violent, unable to function without enacting certain violences and establishing a specific set of relations thereto.

With this in place, we can then reconsider this cinema's and its subjects' ensuing *obsession* with violent material along two, complementary paths. On the one hand, taking cues from Benjamin, Kracauer, Deleuze, and Agamben, the *public* obsession with violence which contributes to and necessitates its fetishistic prominence can be seen as bound up in the fundamental experiential and philosophical crises of modernity and the cinema's problematic role in their "reconciliation," a relation all the more strongly articulated within late capitalism's increasingly paralytic and atomic strictures on knowledge, action, and experience. On the other hand, the *cinema's* obsession with all things violent (up to and including itself) can be examined along the same lines that Deleuze, in *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, posits its like obsession with money: that is, as an internecine struggle with a simultaneously enabling and limiting condition of possibility, concretized all the more inasmuch as violence has long been rendered as the medium's most salable commodity. And in closing, we will examine how these twinned obsessions are taken up, and ultimately justified, in a general sphere of *exception*: a sovereign space both characteristically modern in its political operation and utility, and ultimately, fundamentally, *cinematic*.

APTITUDE & AFFINITY:
TECHNOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL ATTRACTIONS

> *Elemental catastrophes, the atrocities of war, acts of violence and terror, sexual debauchery, and death are events which tend to overwhelm consciousness. In any case, they call forth excitements and agonies bound to thwart detached observation. No one witnessing such an event, let alone playing an active part in it, should therefore be expected accurately to account for what he has seen. Since these manifestations of crude nature, human or otherwise, fall into the area of physical reality, they range all the more among the cinematic subjects. Only the camera is able to represent them without distortion.*
>
> *Actually the medium has always shown a predilection for events of this type…*[6]
>
> Siegfried Kracauer
> *Theory of Film*

> *Everything visible appears to us in the light, we believe our eyes and the light calmly appears to us as* the truth of the world.[7]
>
> Paul Virilio
> *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*

From spectacular scenes of mass destruction to the queasy intimacy of a private murder, the cinema is undoubtedly nonpareil at *representing* violence. To a certain extent, this is due to those conceptual and phenomenal affinities which bind the violent and the visible: the ways in which violence presents itself, is made to be presented, and is consequently comprehended as such within and through the visible register. But presentation and representation – and from this, presentability and representability – are, of course, not the same thing; if we are to consider the cinematic apparatus as a truly violent machine – that is, as an instrument of violence, not simply a mechanism of its representation – and if indeed we can consider violence "in reality" as the unwelcomed and unmediated emergence of the im-mediate, as evasive of or even antithetical to those means of representation which would seek to accommodate it to consciousness and experience, there is something missing from this idea of an equation of cinematic representations of violence with violence, "itself," as violence. For violence, by the terms we have at least provisionally defined, is *fully* unrepresentable in two ways: first because of those constitutional evasions of violence to means of its representation and comprehension – that is, in its *unspeakability*, its antithetical status vis-à-vis the discourse that would speak it or have it safely spoken – and second in its

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[6] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 57.

[7] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 38.

unspoken-ness, in the impossibility of full and candid disclosure and acknowledgement of the centrality of violence and its images vis-à-vis prevailing structures of discursive relations and econo-political processes.

But that "something" that is absent from the equation, that alchemic force of translation between and binding the registers of presentation and representation – and not only as concerns violence – is and has long been precisely the cinema itself. To be sure, it indexically records and realistically, iconically re-presents, qualities which alone mark something of a borderline or point of immediate coincidence between these registers, where representational capacities precipitate presentational qualities. Yet as Deleuze argues implicitly throughout his cinema books and somewhat more explicitly in later interviews and commentaries thereon, the medium is foremost a mechanism of expressive presentation, and not only or simply its simulacral other. For Deleuze, this is a purely qualitative distinction, bearing less on the production of an image (for all images produced are representations) than on the mode and manner of the relation between the spectator/subject and the image/object, the degree to which that distinction and distance are either preserved in the relation or diffused and collapsed. Representation, on the one hand, contains within its movement and relations an impulse toward the objective universalization of the represented, a referentialization of what is recorded in a closed autoreferential set that presupposes and pre-constitutes a spectator in kind (a constitutive compact of rational agreement between the perceiving subject and the perceived object: e.g., "this is violence"); this is clearly the case in the cinematic image in its objective and objectivizing capture of whatever passes before its lens to be inscribed (or immortally memorialized) on film. But even more fundamental than this, Deleuze suggests,

> the question isn't whether the cinema can aspire to universality. It's not a question of universality but of singularity: what are the image's singularities? The image is a figure characterized not by any way it universally represents anything but by its internal singularities, the singular points it connects...[8]

The force and power of a given image, then, is something quite distinct from either what it re/presents or from the fact that something has been represented (with all the violence this act entails). Rather, it is in how the image – which for Deleuze determines its perception as much as it is determined by perception – may directly present specific crystallizations of the relation of forces and meanings, in how the image constitutes an active production of conceptual matter that impacts upon the thinking mind and feeling body. The immediacy of *that* production and its effects extend beyond the mediations entailed in the production and reception of the image-qua-representation *per se*, with every image holding the potential to activate and express new modes of thinking (concepts), seeing (percepts), and feeling (affects), to reorganize the flows and economies of desire, knowledge, and sensation; the only decisive limitations on the image's ability to affect in these ways (limitations that are themselves dynamically, historically determinate vis-à-vis the conditions of permissibility and possibility immanent to the moment of the image's production and reception) are the parameters of what is, can be, and can be conceived to be represented or representable in the image and the receptive capacities of the screen upon which they are projected (the screen of the mind in the theater of a mode of existence). While the procedures, ends, and content of representation certainly work to limit the forces and outcomes of the cinematic image's capacity for direct presentation, it is neither the origin nor the end of what the cinema, aesthetically, philosophically, or even economically, entails. Rather, it is a negotiation between forces of territorialization and deterritorialization, and what it produces and what it presents is precisely that: a negotiation, a relation, every image an event that exceeds its representational objectivity, but that is always also subject to the other economies (or desire, of knowledge, and so forth) that structure its production, motivation, and encounter.

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[8] Deleuze, "Doubts About the Imaginary," *Negotiations*, 65.

It is thus that the effects of immediacy and objective transparency at the center of both cinematic presentation and reception, while to a large extent predicated on the same qualities of its representational capacities, is what is always of primary concern; the question of the reality or realism (for example) of what *is* re/presented is consequently *not* the fundamental issue that we must explore to understand the cinema's abiding attractions and relations to the violent. Instead, the primary question must always be: what is this medium – and any medium, really – *capable* of re/presenting given its conditions of possibility and necessity, and from this, what conclusions might we be able to draw from these aptitudes and affinities, as forces which ultimately come not only to direct, but to define a medium?

* * *

Calling directly to the question of violence and the medium's potential for its direct translation, similar sentiments guide Siegfried Kracauer, in his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of*

Physical Reality, to open his materialist ontology of the cinema by mapping out the covalent processes of representation and presentation within a discussion of the medium's most defining operations: the recuperative recording and revealing of physical reality. Two sides of a single process, this recording and revealing constitutes a doubly-articulated concept of "camera reality": both the matter which is inherently appropriate to the apparatus (material reality, broadly defined, as what the camera is most properly capable of representing) and the apparatus' capacity to frame that matter to its own and ownmost ends (the reality, or reality-effect, created by the camera). At first blush (and ordinally in his discussion), these operations are functions primarily endowed by the medium's technological capacities for representation, both in terms of the apparatus "in itself" and in its relation to the like capacities of other media and technologies in the modern discursive field. But what Kracauer most usefully establishes in this text – which is often expressly concerned with the medium's capacities for the direct presentation of spectacular, disturbing, or otherwise violent content – is that the cinema's general *affinity* with such violent, im-mediate, and perhaps previously im-mediatable material in its articulation of materiality is informed and enabled by a specific *aptitude* which is *both technological and ontological*: these latter capacities creating a field of mutual gravitation, drawing the medium to these events, and they to it.

Technologically speaking, this aptitude is strictly intuitive and sensible. Certainly, if we are to consider violence in its primary frame as those phenomena which present themselves to vision as "an extreme form of action," a conceptualization coming to bear on intensities of motion, temporality, and scale and thus a certain problem for both representation and perception, it is sensible to note an accordingly primary level of technological aptitude for the capture and representation of such material on the part of the camera. In terms of basic ability to capture such phenomena – an explosion, a punch, a car crash, a shooting, etc. – the motion picture camera opens itself to such phenomena in a singular way, recording the profilmic event in real time, and unblinkingly: those horrible visions against which we might shield our eyes, those instantaneities which may catch us unawares, and even, as in the case of the explosion of an atomic bomb, those events whose force and overwhelming scale would destroy our very bodies, are all merely objects as any other for the camera's mechanical *enregistrement*; its only constraints being the scope of its lens, the quality of its optics, the quantity of film, and the speed at which its shutter can parse what occurs before it into subsegmented slices of real time, real life, in progress.

These technological conditions thus allow for both the recording and subsequent presentation of such phenomena in ways that reframe them to our physically and psychically limited sight: the wide-angle lens capturing scales of action (or destruction) too vast for the field of vision, the zoom lens those too microcosmic; increased shutter speeds slowing the temporally immediate for our inspection, time lapse revealing the slow processes of decay. The cold objectivity of the camera, as an apparatus enabling the mechanically consistent and intrinsically dispassionate capture of the phenomenal world, is critical in this regard, making it the ideal foil of those phenomena that in scope, scale, speed, or even subjective "stopping points" exceed or evade not only embodied spectatorial vision, but also the basic representational capacities of other media and their technologies of capture. In short, the primary aptitude and affinity at stake here, at least with phenomenal violence, is in the first case purely instrumental in the technological sense of the term: the motion picture camera being the most apt representational tool for the capture and registration of material that, in its constitutional im-mediacy and resistance to representation, is otherwise im-mediatable by other means, a machine custom-built to these ends.

But while the camera's technological ability to record and reframe such phenomena is critical in constituting their mutual attraction, this affinity between the cinema and the violent is for Kracauer as much ontological as technological: the latter capacities opening (but, in fact, determined by) the former's to those phenomena that constitute its evident points of irresistible attraction. At this intersection – or better, point of coterminance – of the technological and ontological, Kracauer notes an abiding affinity between the cinema and the broadest range of experiential realities from which our historical, material, psychological, physical, and perceptual realities have been disenfranchised and disengaged. From the invisibly complex mechanics of the quotidian to those phenomena that fully exceed sensorial or cognitive capacities, the litany of "properly cinematic subjects" Kracauer attends is exhaustive: beyond the general register of "movement," he also places among the cinema's singular purview "inanimate objects," "things normally unseen," "phenomena overwhelming consciousness," "special modes of reality," "the unstaged," "the fortuitous," "endlessness," "the indeterminate," and finally, ultimately, the very "flow of life."[9] Each of these, for Kracauer, evidences "inherent affinities" with the medium, and it with they.[10] These affinities emerge not only within the terrain of objective recording and recordability (the technological end of things, which supercede and circumvent the objective and subjective limits of human perception, from the bio-physical limits of ocular scope and receptability to the scotomae and distortions inherent in witnessing, inscription in memory, and subsequent recollection), but also, coevally and equally, within the ontological purview of cinematic *revelation*: from the simple physics of such phenomena "in themselves" to their place within very patterns of the fabric of experience and meaning, Kracauer is unambiguous and unequivocal: "only the camera can represent them without distortion,"[11] at once sharpening, broadening, and returning our focus to the fullest range of epistemological, perceptual, and experiential realities.

In this, Kracauer proposes a materialist ontology of the cinema that is hinged on an immanentist-existentialist drive directed along two superimposed tracks: the redemptive reclamation of physical experience in the face of characteristically "modern" forces of alienation (the re/turn to materiality), and the rendering-legible of these arrangements and phenomena as a means, however problematic, to that reclamational end (the revelatory power of the cinematic image affecting cognition and sensation via perception). Consequently, the purely technological capacity to record such phenomena is ultimately only of supplemental importance here, as a mechanical and material condition of possibility for the medium's social, political, and philosophical functions. Kracauer's interest in what he calls the "peculiar potentialities of film"[12] as it "enacts the historical return to materiality"[13] – that is to say, the potentialities of camera-reality – primarily regards the medium's singular ability (at least at the time of his thought and writing) to reframe and reveal the conditions of reality to the body and consciousness those conditions have determined, a body and consciousness in turn and indeed (re)awakened by these revelations, and all this less by any particular set of aesthetic or political intentions on the part of the filmmaker (important as they may be in the process of isolating such details) than by the power of revelation as the medium's ownmost objective property, its ownmost ontological drive, and ultimately its truest promise – if not one always, inevitably, or indeed plausibly made good. "In recording and exploring physical reality," Kracauer concludes, "the cinema virtually challenges us to confront that reality with the notions we commonly entertain about it – notions which keep us from perceiving it."[14]

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[9] While their respective theories are in innumerable ways quite distinct, this particular concept most immediately connects Kracauer's cinema project with Deleuze's. "The flow of life," as Miriam Bratu Hansen explains in the introduction to the 1997 English edition, is for Kracauer here an image of history and time divorced from teleology and instead conceived as an "open-ended limitless world" (xiii), which more or less directly corresponds to the Bergsonian concept of *durée* around which Deleuze organizes his cinema books as the "open whole" upon which the movement- and time-images of cinema open in their own movement ("cinematic time," Deleuze says in "A Letter to Serge Daney," "isn't a time that flows on but one that endures and coexists with other times." (*Negotiations*, 74.)). For both thinkers, then, the cinema's ontological or philosophical function is realized in the prehension of the *durée*/open whole/flow of life, the images the medium produces not as indexical markers of a static reality, but rather as qualitative indices of a particular immanent relation to the whole which return that relation to the whole. Ultimately, Hansen notes that while "(i)n *Theory of Film* Kracauer is concerned with surface reality," he nonetheless mediates the dehistoricizing force of his metaphysical/phenomenological approach by situating "the 'flow of life' as the locus of opacity and indeterminacy – not just a multiplicity and changeability of meanings but the possibility of a basic indifference to sense and legibility. (…) (T)he fringe of indeterminacy that surrounds 'camera-reality' is as much a product of overdetermination as it is one of underexposure: It is the aura of history's vast refuse or debris, the snowy air reflecting the perpetual blizzard of media images and sounds, the 'hyperindexicality' that at once distinguishes and threatens to defeat cinematic representation." (xxx)

[10] Even the names of early devices bear witness to these intrinsic affinities: as Kracauer observes (following Sadoul's *L'Invention du cinema*), "such names as vitascope, bioscope, and biograph [to say nothing of zoetrope and zoopraxiscope, which interestingly enough are excluded from the litany in a way that would undoubtedly raise Agamben's interest and chagrin] were undoubtedly intended to convey the camera's affinity with 'life,' while terms like kinetoscope, kinetograph, and cinematograph testified to the concern with movement." (*Theory of Film*, 28; brackets mine) While I resist making too much of the obvious here, the oft-noted violence in the language of filmmaking ("shooting," "cutting," "action!") most certainly also derives from this trajectory, as do some recent techniques of image-production (notably "bullet time," a technique we will discuss in Chapter Four).

[11] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 57.

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[12] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 240.

[13] This trope, which organizes Kracauer's Marseilles notebooks (the precursor to *Theory of Film*, which Miriam Hansen discusses in detail in the latter's introduction), is both more complex than it might first appear and central to Kracauer's appeals to the medium's revelatory capacities (and, indeed, its ontological singularity and historical necessity). As Hansen remarks, "Film ... like hardly any other art form ... has the ability to confront 'intention with being,' with existence, facticity, and contingency. The direction of this confrontation is downward ... with the effect of deflating myths and ideals, conventions and hierarchies that have lost their material basis, if they ever had one, in social reality – an effect for which Kracauer uses the shorthand *dégonflage* ["letting the air out" or "deflating"]. As in his Weimar writings, film's materialist capability not only undercuts the sovereign subject of bourgeois ideology but with it a larger anthropocentric worldview that presumes to impose meaning and control upon a world that increasingly defies traditional distinctions between the human and the nonhuman, the living and the mechanical, the unique (integrated, inner-directed) individual and the mass subject, civilization and barbarism." (Introduction, xvii; brackets mine)

[14] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 240-241. These comments are made in discussion of cinematic adaptations of literature, here, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and the John Ford film of the same. Here, Kracauer notes, it is not only that "Steinbeck meets the cinema more than halfway," in his descriptive evocation of grand social movements and group behavior (he asks, evoking Benjamin's notes in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as his answer, "Are not crowds a cinematic subject par excellence?") and "collective misery, collective fears and hopes" which "[reveal] and [stigmatize] abuses in our society." (240; brackets mine) Certainly, this would be enough to make his claim for such a potentiality. But it is his perfunctory opening remark about the very nature of contemporary literature according itself to the conditions of filmability – an according that already heralds an acknowledgement of the losing battle between the world of words and that of

What Kracauer is keen to distinguish here is how the those aforementioned technological singularities lend – or at least at this moment, lent – the medium a concordantly singular ability to *directly present* that which other media may only *indirectly re-present*, and through this to reframe and restore to consciousness both the fabrication and unfolding of reality in its full experiential immediacy, through eyes to mind and body, de-picted in image. For example, whereas literary works (particularly the novel, in its descriptive mode) may present fungible image-frameworks for the reader, the production of those images (i.e., the work of translation and generation necessary in the passage from text to image) is left to that reader's capacities of ideation, capacities that ultimately in some way involve the creation such images that accord with previous experiential schemas (the tendency of mind to associate descriptions with already-held images, for description itself to call upon these images by way of analogy to the already-known).[15] In the absence of concrete presentation – that is, without the work of *depiction* having already been done – the image of the event thus constituted is purely by the terms (and even at the mercy) of the limits of readerly imagination: the mind's ability to translate, synthesize, and accommodate such described scenarios in images of thought, engaging an individual-interpretive dimension (ones' own images, unique to and for one's self, for better or worse) rather than that of the collective-received (an immediate and incontrovertible image of the world, however tendentially totalizing, for the world: a populist image, a mass image, and hence a political problematic for the public sphere).

It is useful, then, to note some of the specific caveats placed upon Hollywood film by the Hays Code in relation to literature, which is distinctly positioned, and in ways not so different from Kracauer's own arguments, apposite to the cinema on grounds of this

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images, of evocation and presentation, if not yet a folding of the former's hand to the latter – that is of special note here, and not least vis-à-vis the rigid distinctions between media that the Code, discussed below, so relies upon. That *this* novel, canonically heralded as one of the keystones of modern American literature, is also a point at which "the similarities between the literary and the cinematic medium tend to prevail over the differences between the respective universes," (240) is telling as a marker on the path of increasing aesthetic sameness and exchangeability. At the same time, these points of intra-medial overlap, also discussed below, speak to critical issues of the aforementioned presentation/representation distinction which is so singularly problematized by the cinema.

[15] The category of the imagination, its limits, and the ways in which the cinema may confront them are far more complex than this current argument allows; the issue of the relative privileging of ideation and imagination vis-à-vis the force of the image is also critical to this passage. See Chapter Four for a more detailed elaboration of this intersection – coextensive with the above note, though to slightly different ends than those that might be requisite for a full discussion here – within a more general statement on the atrophy of (and violence to) imagination and affect in spectacular society.

representation/presentation (and representable/presentable) divide, particularly as concerns the notions of the "purely objective image" as it intersects with the "freely subjective imagination." Section 3.D. of *The Reasons Supporting Preamble of Code* lists the following considerations:

> a. A book describes; a film vividly presents. One presents on a cold page; the other by apparently living people.
> b. A book reaches the mind through words merely; a film reaches the eyes and ears thought the reproduction of actual events.
> c. The reaction of a reader to a book depends largely on the keenness of the reader's imagination; the reaction to a film depends on the vividness of presentation. Hence many things which might be described or suggested in a book could not possibly be presented in a film.[16]

With remarkable acuity, this passage both reflects Kracauer's basic ontological ascriptions and refracts them, vis-à-vis an explicitly recognized set of political concerns concatenated with the medium's specific means of representation and the events/objects toward which those means are most suited. First and foremost, obviously, is the issue of presentation: the medium's technological capacity to directly and im-mediately affect, and even overwhelm, the viewer in ways that supracede normalized noetic frames. Second, and related to this, is the distortionless capture of material and physical reality (itself, in its own way, violent; to wit: "visibilities entail statements of capture,"[17] a matter to be addressed later) and the subsequent verisimilitude and "vividness of presentation" that exceeds literary (or generally linguistic) de*script*ion in the immediacy of cinematic de*pict*ion: acts carried out by "apparently living people," and the "reproduction of actual events," im-mediately projected through the im-mediatable limbic sensoria of vision and audition. Finally, and ultimately most clearly, is the "dangerous" capacity for the cinema, in its "distortionless" and "overwhelming" – and by Kracauer's terms, revelatory and redemptive – mode of capture and re/presentation, to vividly exceed those political and ideological imperatives already active and embedded within the violent imaginary: capturing and presenting things "as they are," in the "light of truth," definitively and uniformly to the broadest social field.

At the "other end" of the presentational spectrum, the depictive-pictorial arts – painting and photography foremost among them – also offer a problematically indirect representational model for such immediate and overwhelming phenomena: the painting (for example) synthesizing and foregrounding the artist's own complexes of imagination, ideation, and recollection in such a way as to be re-read by others, and thus putting at a critical distance the immediacy of the event depicted. Even photography – which for even such a cinephiliac as Bazin was "clearly the most important event in the history of the plastic arts," liberating painting from all constraints and demands of representational realism and allowing for one "to admire in reproduction something that our eyes alone could not have taught us to love"[18] – which provides for Kracauer the fundament of his cinematic ontology (the camera's general technological capacity for the recording and capture of the immediate, the precarious balance between realist and formative tendencies producing revelatory images of both the phenomenal material world and the forces of historical movement, and so forth), is limited in its revelatory capacities: the photograph constituting a single moment frozen in and extracted from the flow of experience, disconnected and isolated as evidence or a corpse, always-already past and static in relation to the movement of history itself; like the novel or the painting, it is a different kind of historical representation with a different relation to history and (its) representation.[19]

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[16] Belton, "The Production Code," 144.

[17] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 81.

This is not to say, however, that for Kracauer film supercedes photography or makes its own ontological conditions irrelevant any more than it does for literature: rather, "photography survives in film"[20] with the two sharing four of five basic affinities: for the unstaged, the fortuitous, endlessness (24 consecutive hours, and five routes of passage: vast expanses of physical reality, the chain of causes and effects responsible for events, sustained contemplation of an object to reveal its unlimited aspects, the multiple experiences and sensations coordinate with a single, critical moment, and formless but rhythmic material phenomena, from machines to waves), and the indeterminate (including psychophysical correspondences). Only cinema, however, can present images of "the flow of life," evoking "a reality more inclusive than the one they actually picture,"[21] an immediate yet dynamic image of *totality* that opens on a completely different spatiotemporal and experiential phenomenology: in Christian Metz's terse appraisal, "(t)he movie spectator is absorbed, not by a 'has been there,' but by a sense of 'There it is.'"[22] Kracauer explains the tenuous nature of this distinction as follows: "Like photography, film tends to cover all material phenomena virtually within reach of the camera. To express the same otherwise, it is as if the medium were animated by the chimerical desire to establish the continuum of physical existence."[23] At the same time, however, "(i)n establishing physical existence, films differ from photographs in two respects: they represent reality as it evolves in time; and they do so with the aid of cinematic techniques and devices."[24]

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[18] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol.I*, 16.

[19] See Barthes (*Camera Lucida*) and Benjamin ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "On Photography") for related theorizations of this distinction as a philosophical, aesthetic, and discursive problematic.

[20] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 60.

[21] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 71.

For Kracauer, the cinema fulfills the ontology of the photographic in much the same way as the photographic fulfilled that of painting – a fulfillment born of immanent historio-cultural *necessity* more than historio-technological telos. And it is in this, the cinema's (here, most pronouncedly technological[25]) ability to "move beyond" the static and quiescent spatio-temporal limitations of photography (as both a means of production and the images produced[26]) that for Kracauer situates and defines the medium's unique revelatory capabilities. As an extension of photography's im-mediate representational and revelatory capacities, the capture of events as they unfold in time, and in the re-presentation of the same, is what fully constitutes the cinema's singular capability to not simply re/present a moment, event, or scenario, but to do so in its *totality*, its entire *duration*, and in this to position the viewer as a *direct witness to the immediate and continual unfolding of the present (as) moment*; indeed, this is not simply a capacity or effect "of the cinema" (that is, of and limited to the apparatus): this *is* cinema, *the cinematic*.[27] For Kracauer, it is thus not simply that the cinema *can* apprehend such subjects like no other, but that these subjects are inherently cinematic, or better, *cinematogenic*: drawing and demanding its attention, explaining not only why they "seem to exert a peculiar attraction on the medium," but also how "(i)t is as if the medium were predestined (and eager) to exhibit them."[28]

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[22] Metz, *Film Language*, 6. As Barthes notes in *Camera Lucida* (in a passage we will return to in Chapter Four), "the Photograph's *noeme* deteriorates when [it] is animated and becomes cinema: in the Photograph, something has posed in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling); but in cinema, something has passed in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images: it is a different phenomenology, and therefore a different art which begins here, though derived from the first one." (78; brackets mine)

[23] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 63.

[24] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 41.

[25] Something might be said here, however, along Bazinian lines: that the medium's invention was not of technological accident, arising from the confluences of devices and mechanisms available at the historical moment of its invention, but rather from a more intangible – though no less historically-specific – philosophical and artisinal drive, the latters' condition of necessity as the mother of the medium's invention. While I find Bazin's take on the matter to be somewhat problematic – his simultaneous patronizing and valorizing of the cinema's early experimenters as figures of Icarus, and more fundamentally his admittedly provocative and attractive claim that in the drive to realize the originary "myth of total cinema," "(e)very new development added to the cinema must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins. In short, cinema has not yet been invented!" (*What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 21), which places undue emphasis on a mythic telos – the more general notion that the cinema was born of a dream of inaccessible unity and utopian control of reality not in accord with the conditions of that reality – social, even technological (i.e., the cinema "waiting to have been born," if not as a kind of messianic savior-figure) – are not so easily dismissible in light of Kracauer's materialist idealism.

[26] A cursory, and certainly incomplete, distinction might be noted here about the relative materiality of these media and their experience as such: unlike the film, the photograph is a thoroughly material referent, a discrete object that while it may be infinitely reproduced may also be held, possessed, grasped in its materiality both physically and psychically. As a concrete, intransigent and fungible referent, the materiality of the photograph is one that escapes or evades the inhering ephemerality of film: all light and shadow and speed, the film is virtuality in motion (even today, when one can "purchase a film" for home viewing, the tape or disc is not the film itself: what one purchases and holds is merely a tangible device through which the intangible image may be transmitted, another medium for the medium, never directly the thing itself, as with the photographic print).

In "The Existence of Italy," Fredric Jameson helps to situate precisely why, in the end, the cinema's predilection and affinity for the immediate-existential in general (and violence in particular) are demanded in, and part of, its singular drive for the reclamation of existential/physical reality:

> Why for both Bazin and Kracauer this essential ontological truth of the still photograph demanded fulfillment, but not in that medium (and most often in the fiction film), strikes one as being very closely related to the problems of temporality, reification, and the "existential" as they menace the photographic print as such, which the movement of film dissolves back into the irrevocable passage of time. No consumable image – of the type of the still photograph – survives this processing as an object: and the great moments of some Bazinian "epiphany" are not salvageable as simple "freeze-frames" reproduced from the negative. They cannot, in other words, be *translated* back into photography, but constitutively presuppose the inevitability of time and change and loss as the price they must pay to become events rather than things. In such moments perception can only persist as the promise of memory, and then as memory itself: in film, therefore, the realities of the "existential" – time and death, the very death of the image in question – are drawn back into the formal process, so that they do not have to be added in as content and as message, in that slippage from history to finitude (from the political to the existential-physical) which we have observed at work in the interpretation of still

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[27] In a very specific way, this is perhaps precisely the means by which we can speak today of "cinematic violence" or any such thing at all, and particularly to posit an enduring primacy of the cinema(tic) in an age where, by all accounts, the medium "as such" is assailed on all sides by competing image-entertainments. "The Cinema," and "The Cinematic," then, are not any longer – nor were they ever necessarily – bound to the specific apparatus and *means* of production as such: rather, it is a *mode* of production (of images, of consciousness, of subjects, of reality itself) that is at stake here. With melancholic ambivalence, Kracauer notes in his "Photography" essay that "The world itself has taken on a 'photographic face'," and in Hansen's more direct terms, "Photographability has become the condition under which reality is constituted and perceived." (Introduction, xxvi; citation hers)

[28] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 41.

> photography. The very movement of film, therefore, makes the existential component of still photography concrete and experiential, thus liberating the contents of the image itself for a more historical and social intuition of Being.[29]

By a logistical scheme of reverse determination similar to that marking the ontological fulfillment of previous media, the cinema thus also reclaims experience for experience itself, liberating it from the stasis, anhedonia, and most crucially fragmentation of the everyday in its experience as a series of highly charged but additively alienating *moments*, a structure of experience that film replicates to be sure, but in such a way as to constitute a point of departure or difference from quotidian conditions, a re-cognition and re-presentation which allows for those conditions to be apprehended in their objective character. It is the disalienation, so to speak, of the conditions of alienation by the same means, and as such carries the same kind of melancholiac charge as the photographic processes and mode of receptivity which cinema extends: in Kracauer's words,

> it favors self-estrangement, which on its part entails identification with all kinds of objects. The dejected individual is likely to lose himself in the incidental configurations of his environment, absorbing them with a disinterested intensity no longer determined by his previous preferences.[30]

In both capturing and representing the moment as such (a function of the camera, hewing to the "realist tendency" which marks for Kracauer the medium's ontological truth) and connecting moment to moment, in textual arrangements (a function of the full apparatus, opening on the "formative tendency" which subtends the previous into ideological territory) and from text to experience (a function of the spectator's encounter with the text through the apparatus, the site at which the two tendencies and their respective effects are negotiated), in this entire *process* by which the ephemeral conditions of experience may be reframed, rearranged, and revealed, the cinema is for Kracauer both a mechanism of truth to consciousness and a homeopath for an age of melancholiac alienation and illusion, leading him to idealistically muse that

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[29] Jameson, "The Existence of Italy," *Signatures of the Visible*, 192. Much as photography puts in historical and representational relief the practice and discourse of painting, so too does cinema liberate photography's potentialities, taking on the onus which it was never capable of bearing. Along these lines, in our current context, we might note also that "cinema survives in" television, the world wide web, information on demand, and image culture in general, but (like photography, like the photographic image) does not make the transition unscathed (even if, and crucially, it can return its transformed self to itself, as in internet films, split frames, the discontinuity of commercial interruptions and channel surfing, television ads on the big screen, etc.). Interestingly enough, it is in the excesses of immediacy that mark spectacular society that the cinema, like those media before it, is again guaranteed conditions under which it can continue to fulfill its ontological function.

[30] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 17.

> (a) possibility as radical as this one would be the following: one might think of a film which suggests the infinite chain of causes and effects interlinking the historical events as we know them. Such an effort toward establishing a causal continuum – an effort in keeping with the cinematic approach (...) – would bring to the fore numerous incidents instrumental in the 'unfolding of destinies' and thus lure the spectator out of the closed cosmos of poster-like *tableaux vivants* into an open universe.[31]

Given the medium's historically and histologically determined affinity with the material and the ephemeral (indeed, in the aleatory "flow of life" he describes, the ephemerality *of* the material), the moment as an experiential-existential phenomenon and problematic – its disconnectedness, its discreteness, its characteristic *shock* – is unquestionably very much at the center of the Kracauerian cinematic ontology, where unstaged, unexpected, and overwhelming phenomena put the otherwise innocuous flows of time and matter into stark temporal and experiential relief. As Leo Charney argues in "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity," the emergence of moment as the defining trait of industrial modernity and as a discursive, phenomenal, experiential, and philosophical problematic required a full reconceptualization alongside and in relation to the cinema's emergence. "The concept of the moment," he says, "provided a means to fix an instant of feeling, yet this effort at stability had to confront the inescapable fact that no moment could stay still."[32] Amidst the barrage of sensorial data and the rushed pace of urban industrial-modern life, it is not insignificant that the cinema's earliest obsessions with highlighting the moment as moment specifically, even "naturally," tended to privilege the violent moment, which, in the same movement, all the more defined the moment *as* violent, a notion certainly most clearly articulated (and celebrated) by Benjamin. As Charney explains,

> Benjamin's concept of "shock" delineated a category, which Benjamin elsewhere allied to the "constant sudden change" of film and modern life, of sharp ephemeral sensations that hit the modern subject with great intensity. (...) To experience a shock was to experience a moment ... shock framed and defined the moment as a moment ... [and] jolted the modern subject into a tangible awareness of the presence of the present.[33]

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[31] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 80.

[32] Charney, "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity," 279.

[33] Charney, "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity," 285.

This dialectical articulation of the moment and/as violence, however, has consequences for how we might consider the medium's relation to the violent vis-à-vis the relational complex he calls the "flow of life." Given its temporal and affective immediacy, Kracauer reasons that the violent moment (in the simplest empirical sense of "a moment of violence") is thoroughly "genuine film material," with the qualitative immediacy of its emergence and its affective impact fully retained in translation. As such, violence is reinscribed within the field of the immediate, the unexpected, and the singular: the irruption of the material world's images of continuities and coherence, the breakdown of its order circumscribed within a discrete temporal register and its *enregistrement.*

To an extent, this may be understood as not only sensible but also unavoidable, given that, as Jameson puts it in *A Singular Modernity*, there is obviously an "intimate relationship between violence as content and the 'moment' as form."[34] But at the same time,

> there is a demonstrable slippage between the temporal violence with which the empty form of the moment is disengaged from the continuum of time and the awareness that it is the very experience of empirical violence itself that offers a supremely privileged content for the representation of such a form.[35]

To the extent that such a branding reserves the conceptual and affective parameters of violence *for* such moments and such moments alone – for the momentary, immediate, and ephemeral, rather than the sustained, structural, or material – a particular aporia emerges for the medium's revelatory-redemptive capacities: the "presence of the present" Charney describes becoming not just the object of revelation, but the threatening the reduction of the latter's logic to that field alone. While the tactically and tactilely violent quality of "the immediate presence of the present" is certainly characteristic of not only empirical violence but of the moment as such (as conceived by both Kracauer and Benjamin), its cinematic capture and rendering within the context of an aesthetic experience of "shock" is problematic, a potential violence against violence that has particularly nefarious implications in our current context of relentless momentary-ness; as Jameson explains,

> (t)he very violence with which the experience of suddenness tears the present of time out of its continuum and allows it to subsist in a kind of strange autonomy can then be transferred onto the conceptual level, where the now-dominant form of the moment declares its independence from the synchronic as well as the diachronic

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[34] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 195.

[35] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 195.

> texture of history and historical temporality. This is the point at which the concept of the moment can be autonomized as that of 'aesthetic appearance divorced from being … [and] bought at the price of surrender of historical categories' … or, more exactly, at which the more restricted claim can be made that 'the concept of appearance is … compatible with history, but its "phenomenal" character resists any temporal determination'.[36]

By this paradigm, these moments are simply that: transitory and ephemeral, temporal aberrances in a plane materially and conceptually apart from the historical process, phenomena relatively distant, relatively self-contained, and as such of relatively little connection or consequence to the outside world – a notion of violence whose legacy is still very much with us, and not simply in the cinema.

But because, as Kracauer explains, the medium works to put the folds and unfolding of the causal chain back into relief by arranging and tracing the hidden or elided organization behind and across such discontinuously experienced moments, we must also question the revelatory violence *of* such moments vis-à-vis the violence represented *in* them. Inasmuch as causality is an essentially narrative concept and not the other way around (that is, causality as such cannot be understood properly apart from a synthesizing, narrativizing drive[37]), it stands to reason that the medium's turn to narrativity in the face of extrinsic experiential demands was as much (or at least no less than) of a kind of epistemological-existential crisis as of some more limited notion of "the narrative film" as an endpoint to be reached under the demands, both popular and political, that the medium accede to the order of more established representational/expressive artforms, such as the novel or the theatre. But in this (re)turn to causal concerns, and certainly in the narrative modes through which they are attended and given shape, a critical reduction occurs with the coeval operation of what (for cinema, at least) could be seen as a rudimentary complicity with the terms and operation of the violent imaginary: violence is at once relegated to the status of event *within* the causal chain, and whether it is framed as an irruption or as a necessary corrective or progressive action, it remains bound within a general field of causes and consequences: *that is, no longer as im-mediate, no longer as moment-ous.*

With this, one could say that violence both loses and gains its fundamental meaning in the movement of the medium from the framing and capture of a singular, violent moment as such to the "dialectic between spectacle and narrative" which today all the more marks our own cinema of attractions – however "tamed" these latter may be, as Tom Gunning would rightly have it.[38] Indeed, it is in this "taming," this odd "domestication" of violence into the kinds of spectacular and episodic moments that structure our still-predominately "action-oriented" cinema, that violence is both fully immersed in the formal-experiential category of the moment and, at the same time, extruded from the sense of its pure immediacy vis-à-vis external frames of causation and externalizing processes of aesthetic autonomization: the result a spectacular banality, a consumable and contained episode, a reified and contained event.[39]

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[36] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 190.
[37] Cf. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 33.

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Certainly, we must further account for the fact that the medium's revelatory functions and capacities have always been twinned with, and certainly hobbled by, the cinema's place within a general commerce of sensationalism. Favoring the thrill at the calculated expense of revealing the structural or systemic violences of the everyday, these extreme existential phenomena are most frequently (and certainly interestedly) presented for the simple sake *of* their presentation, further spectacularizing and sensationalizing the already-sensational in such a way as to simultaneously raise and reduce such material to the status of a fetishized commodity (the thrill of the "never-before-(allowed-to-be-)seen" as selling point, a maneuver we of course are all too familiar with in contemporary commercial cinema, manifested in so many ways[40]).

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[38] Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," 61. As Gunning remarks, "the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself. (…) Theatrical display dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct stimulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe. (…) Making use of both fictional and non-fictional attractions, its energy moves outward towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inwards towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative." (58-59) In this, Gunning sees a tendency and a trajectory culminating in the contemporary "Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects" (61) which remains the template for the bulk of commercial blockbuster cinema. Yet at the same time, in the emphasis on the theatricality of the display and the intensivity of the particular moment as such, we can recognize precisely those admonitions Kracauer explicitly and implicitly levies against the formative tendencies dominating the narrative film: namely, the movement away from the direct presentation and experience of physical reality as such, in the sense of the totality of a "reality more inclusive than the one [the images] actually picture." This opens on considerations of the subjective image and the medium's capacity to approximate "special modes of reality" that are attended in the next section, as well as the general tendency already noted of the medium's potentialities being equally and always-already amenable to less than idealistic ends.

[39] This line of consideration is extended in Chapter Three as coordinate with the episode as a consumable and exchangeable commodity-unit in contemporary corporate cinema. Kracauer discusses the quality of the episode at length in *Theory of Film* (see pp. 251-260), particularly in terms of the dialectic between its irreducibility (as a "monad or cell [that] resists further division") and its relative permeability(which permits them to be "strung together like beads so that they attain a degree of cohesion," even "[relinquishing] their independence" to the degree that they are "hardly indistinguishable from each other, becom[ing] parts of a story into which they are integrated like the cells of a living organism." (252-253) For Kracauer, it is in the gaps between the episodes that the flow of life streams or seeps in, and his account of the episode film is very much like Deleuze's of the time-images of Italian Neorealism; in concluding, however, he opens the possibility that the episode might also relinquish its permeability to the flow of life, hermetically sealing itself off from its relation to reality as such and thereby voiding its promises.

Because this line of inquiry involves questions (not so far apart) of both money and the obsession with violence, these matters will be more fully attended later. For the moment, it may be enough to note another specific set of consequences that arise from this attraction to the violent and the compulsion to re/present it: the inclusion of such material in cinematic production and presentation with no further intent than to simply shock and titillate the paying audience with innumerable, overwhelming sights otherwise unseen or unseeable, and the (not always entirely unfounded) persistence and strength of criticism levied against the industry for this very reason. Philosophically speaking, however, any such admonishment of violence being "for its own sake" is a fundamentally ludicrous proposition that appeals to a bastardized sense of sublimity without ends, and in so doing deflects before the fact any thought of such a proposition's enabling conditions (namely, the idea that anything can be "for its own sake," much less how such a proposition situates violence within the realm of the purely excessive or sense-less); the same holds true, of course, for celebrations of violence by these same terms. Politically speaking, the underlying operative logic here, holding that the "presentation of the unpresentable" is by default its glorification, is likewise as untenable in its short-sightedness yet critical, inasmuch as it points, however recursively, to the fetishizing commodity character of the image in late capitalism: that which is presented is inherently glorified (inasmuch as it has been anonymously deemed important enough to isolate and show, to foreground and present, even to embrace and desire), and moreover inherently *pornographic* (inasmuch as it commands and arrests our gaze, intensifying the investment of our interest and desire), merely by virtue of having been framed.

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[40] Even the MPAA's current ratings system rating works to this end, its "content warnings" doubling as advertisements for the kind and degree of sensationalism or otherwise "objectionable material" within a given film. This system of "truth-in-advertising," instituted in 1990 as a response to pressures from public interest and lobbying groups, has of course become as much a marketing tool and boon to business as the system of advise and consent it was supposedly intended to fulfill. Because these descriptors range from the maddeningly opaque ("disturbing/frightening images," "adult themes," "pervasive language," etc.) to the equally maddeningly specifically non-specific ("a scene of sensuality," "sci-fi/fantasy violence," "graphic images of torture," etc.), a study of when, why, and to what films (indeed, not all carry such provisos) these descriptors have applied, and to what measurable effects, would be most useful. (As an aside, in the years following the 1999 Columbine shootings, the FTC and FCC have published a number of reports regarding the problematic application of these descriptors, but generally without any specific focus on specific exclusions, let alone a theorization of the reasons for those exclusions: here, the MPAA's right of sovereign self-regulation trumps that of the government, a point important for our closing discussion of *Obsession & Exception.*) At the very least, the disingenuity of this practice and its supposed ends must be noted, and not least because it extends the longstanding, quite profitable tradition of the commodification of excess for which Hollywood has been accused of wallowing in, and not necessarily wrongly in all regards.

Yet despite those nagging and irresolvable *j'accuses* leveled against the cinema throughout its history as to its being a "purely sensationalistic" medium, impelled by the lascivious and obsessional desire to both represent with fetishistic detail the more lurid categories of existence (including violence) and wallow in a grotesquerie of excess "for its own sake," for Kracauer the medium's evidential aptitude for such re/presentations carries consequences that override and supersede such vulgar criticisms of the cinema's supposed inherent vulgarity. While such re/presentations certainly do operate within the overlapping (but ultimately distinct) economies of violence and sensationalism, while they sometimes (if not, as a matter of course, always) pornographically frame and present violence as a sensationalized fetish-object, and while from this they undeniably serve politically valuable and didactic functions of the disciplinary and regulatory sort in the guise of vicarious "mere entertainment," Kracauer is quick to note in protest that

> this argument misses the point. The point is, rather, that the cinema does not simply imitate and continue the ancient gladiator fights or the *Grand Guignol* but adds something new and momentous: it insists on rendering visible what is commonly drowned in inner agitation.[41]

This insistence, of course, is all the more evident in overtly "political films," (as with early Buñuel and Eisenstein, frequent points of reference for Kracauer), where empirical violence in the image – the slaughter of cattle in *Strike*, the slicing of the eyeball in *Un Chien Andalou* – is motivated as either a statement upon or revelation of the violence structural to a mode of production and its mode of existence: the sensible and legible literalization of the fact of violences manifest beyond visible and codified forms. But this insistence is not reserved for the didacticism of the political film, and critically so: the very factuality of the cinematic image, the immediacy of its presentation, its revelation of the arrangements and movements of life itself are all, "before the fact," the expression of an inextinguishable ontological potentiality, actualized "after the fact" in the encounter of the spectator with the apparatus and the images it presents. In other words, while the basic cinematic acts of recording and re-presentation do not necessarily, automatically imply or entail revelation,[42] it is in the re-presentation of this recorded and recoded reality back against another, superimposed upon another – as an image upon an image: a "double-exposure" or montage of dissimilar but contiguous images – that the viewer takes for granted, and that indeed takes the viewer for granted, that such a recognition and revelation occurs.[43]

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[41] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 58.

And while Kracauer will indeed qualify the above statement with the claim that "(o)f course, such revelations conform all the more to the cinematic approach if they bear on actual catastrophes and horrors,"[44] (speaking to the directly captured or re-presented/re-staged events that sufficiently link these overwhelming phenomena to a consciousness of historical, material, or political reality), what is at stake here is not simply another manifestation of the mimetic-objective drive, following and perfecting modernist traditions of realism that such representational technologies as photography and cinema inherited, accommodated, and extended. Nor is it a simple reiteration of the Bazinian dictum of the absolute primacy of a revelatory photo-cinematic ontological function, whereby its images do nothing to add to reality, but only to reveal. Rather, Kracauer's position more closely resembles Mitry's, who recognizes in the cinema an indeterminate estrangement of the world, rendering it neither purely objective nor purely irreal; in Hugh Gray's summation,

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[42] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 41. He notes here, and with pointed precision, that "(t)o be sure, any camera revelation involves recording, but recording on its part need not be revealing." To be sure, this is a curious statement in light of his later claims, as it presupposes the technological capacity of objective recording to be the primary term, and the ontological-revelatory to be secondary, thus putting his notion of the inherently transformative "camera-reality" at something of a distance. It may well be here that Kracauer is implicitly putting his claims at a distance from Bazin's – Bazin, while writing contemporaneously with Kracauer, is absent from his discussions entirely (and vice versa), but certainly is treading similar ontological ground – by not replicating his claims to the coterminance of recording and revelation (for Bazin, the cinema adds nothing to the image represented: it only reveals); this matter could certainly bear further exploration on its own terms. But it also seems that Kracauer here allows himself, and the medium he so celebrates here, a conceptual escape hatch: recognizing that there are not only certain modes of filmmaking that work against an ideality of revelation (for that is the kind of revelation at stake for Kracauer, as it is for Benjamin), but that the medium is also all-too-capable (even equally "eager and willing") of being put to the ideological ends of the worst kinds of propaganda and violence – an actualized tendency all-too-apparent in his *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. In other words, it seems here that the representation which does not mark a point of difference with the prevailing world-picture is, if not a "mere recording," then at least a foreclosure of the medium's ontological imperative in the name of propagandistic, unreflective ideologization. Still, we might take his claims to the primacy and persistence of revelation at their word, and even in these decidedly deleterious modes of illusionment (which themselves reveal, as they did for Kracauer himself, the essence of real conditions in the very character of their illusions), in much the same way (and as noted in the previous chapter) that, as for Deleuze and Guattari, the transcendent may nonetheless be understood itself as the function and the matter of an immanent critique.

[43] It is in the domain of the spectator, within the cinematic space-qua-alternative public sphere, that the revelatory function reveals its simultaneously social and monadic-subjective quality. As Hansen notes, "Kracauer's view of spectatorial activity is diametrically opposed to a cognitivist conception of film viewing as scanning, of 'executing the operations relevant to constructing a story out of the film's representation.' [Her citation is Bordwell, "Narration in the Fiction Film," 30.] Films may *try* to direct our attention more forcefully than a play or novel, but they may also afford us an opportunity to meander across the screen and away from it, into the labyrinths of our own imagination, memories, and dreams. This process takes the viewer into a dimension beyond – or below – the illusory depth of diegetic space, beyond/below the 'intersubjective protocols' and particular kinds of knowledge that govern our understanding of narratives, into the slippery realm of experience, the heterogeneity of social space, the unpredictable dynamics of public life." (Introduction, xxxiii-xxxiv) What Kracauer cannot (and Hansen, despite the framing of her introduction which appeals to the contrary, does not) account for is the way in which this directive force is in today's spectacular cinema always-already coupled with the concerted erasure of chance (from previsualization of shots to the digital erasure of aberrant elements) and the overwhelming quality of the spectacles presented (a plenary totality of sonic and visual effects) in such a way that those detours are less and less viable avenues for the spectator's own lines of flight.

[44] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 58.

> (w)hat the camera reveals ... is not the reality in itself but a new appearance correlated to the world of things – what indeed one may call a camera-perception which, irrespective of the will of the cameraman, produces a certain 'segregation of space,' that is to say, a restructuring of the real so that it can no longer be considered 'objective and immediate.[45]

Similarly, Kracauer's formulation of an interaffective and revelatory camera-reality holds that the cinema does as much to substantively reframe reality on its *own* terms as by those of that "objective reality" it apprehends, does as much to wrestle the conditions of reality to its terms as it sets the terms to which reality itself must accede.[46] And if that reality is marked and structured by violences that are relentlessly dissimulated into other, visible forms, it would only be sensible to conclude, as Kracauer does, that this should be the matter that camera-reality takes as its object, that marks its images, that guarantees its function, and that, with a purpose that exceeds mere gratuitousness of presence, by means true or false, their ends actualized in consciousness or not, both "then" and "now," that

> (t)he cinema aims at transforming the agitated witness into a conscious observer. Nothing could be more legitimate than its lack of inhibitions in picturing spectacles which upset the mind. Thus it keeps us from shutting our eyes to the 'blind drive of things.'[47]

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[45] Gray, Introduction, 6.

[46] This is also an essential thesis of Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema*; as Jameson puts it in "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," "(t)he apparatus – and very specifically the photographic and filmic one – makes its own demands on reality, which, as in the Gulf War, reality then scrambles to fulfil ..." (*The Cultural Turn*, 52). This particular interchange has other consequences vis-à-vis the potential functions of the cine-violent, discussed in the next two sections.

[47] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 58. There is certainly an active, intentional, and directed force implied in the above statement – the cinema's techniques of subjective arrest, its "keep(ing) us from shutting our eyes" in the force of revelation– which also has negative implications that will bear more discussion presently.

Undimmed in the light of our contemporary epistemological, political, and experiential context organized around principles of representation as simulation, Kracauer's camera-reality presents something of a perverse (and unexpectedly productive) twist on Baudrillardian simulation which, while keeping in full force the negative and limiting qualities that Baudrillard ascribes to the process and processing of simulations as a category, also potentially reopens them to a consciousness of their falseness. That is, while the denotative-referential and affective immediacy of these (re)staged, simulated, or simulacral events (which even may refer to other events that while actual, are known only intermediately through cinephrenic memory or reportage of whatever variety) tends toward an unreflective and reflexive conflation of whatever violent spectacle with another, real or imagined, there is another side to this token, inasmuch as these representations, in both quantity and kind, not only disclose a certain instrumental functionality vis-à-vis the immanent complexes of social desires and discursive-political necessities, but also to the coordinate, "progressive" desire and drive on the part of the audience and apparatus alike to see, present, and experience things "as they are" in new ways: be they to the ends of falsity or truth, in either case within a frame that substantively differs from that provided by the simultaneously spectacularly impoverished and saturated everyday, *a desire for an excess of realism grounded in an indissoluble desire for reality*, implicitly but inexorably political, and opened through a mechanism that, even from the start, also tended toward the opposite direction.[48]

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[48] While certainly not emblematic of the Hollywood norm, Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969) presents a prime example of not only the medium's aptitude for the "fortuitous" or "unforeseen" event, but also the indistinction, indeterminacy, and ultimately inconsequentiality of the distinction between the "real" and the "staged" vis-à-vis the revelatory function of the camera-eye and the image of reality it presents. The history of the film's production is critical and singular: quite by accident, Wexler's film came to incorporate actual scenes of police mobilization and violence in response to the 1968 Democratic National Convention; a film that had been planned to attend the convergence of telejournalism and social unrest took on a distinctly more actualitarian quality by incorporating these documentarian elements into the fabric of the film's fiction. While *Medium Cool* quite literally bridges this divide between the real and the staged, and while the effects of the one on the other determined both what the film 'is' and 'was' (but interestingly, not what the cameras recorded: the violence of the police unabated and unabashed in the presence of its recording: crucial, as display of force, as violence always presenting itself to be seen), the degree to which the scenes of state violence retain their documentarian/representational and affective immediacy without knowledge of which scenes were staged and which were not says something: with violence as with everything else in the cinematic age, reality does not matter, realism does. And that realism, for Kracauer, is ultimately *not* an objective or referential matter, but rather fully imbricated in the problematic of the subject as the field upon which the reality-effect is actualized. As Hansen notes, "Kracauer's concern is not with authenticity or verisimilitude, but rather with film's ability to discover and articulate to enact 'the process of materialization'" (Introduction, xvii), its "historical turn to materiality" bearing upon the phenomenal world and the subject's immanent relations to it. Here, exploiting the characteristically cinematic indeterminacy between the "reality" and "unreality" of violence for the

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To be sure, in our current "cinema of (tamed) attractions," such spectacles and the narratives that organize them more often than not work against re/cognition and reflection, and certainly have difficulty in continuing to "upset the mind": we are no longer in the time of those great early-spectator myths where the sight of a gun being fired or of an approaching train will cause visceral panic and flight, nor even in the same conditions under which *Psycho* or *The Exorcist* inspired swooning, nausea, and nightmares (if, indeed, these things really happened outside the mind of a canny marketer). But if this reality compromises Kracauer's more idealist claims, we might still note how the cinema's characteristic force of revelation works not only persistently but productively, and to both extremes of phenomena which for Kracauer prove problematic in their accommodation to consciousness: in confronting the viewer with that which either exceeds the capacities of comprehension (the overwhelming spectacle, framed for fuller comprehensibility) or evades the conditions of consciousness (the "blind spots of the mind," as Kracauer calls them, brought into the proscenium).

Indeed, it is in the confrontation of this latter category, the very limits of knowledge and consciousness, not simply in the face of apprehending those things that "overwhelm" it in spectacular fashion (i.e., the extreme or violent), but to those conditions which might come into dissonance with its own economies and constitution – *in the bringing of consciousness into contact with that which is denied to it in experience or that which it denies itself* – that the cinema might be regarded as most violent in the productive (and most political) sense, fully realizing the potentials that inhere in its most basic aptitudes and affinities with the phenomenal world and its specific affinity-cum-ontological obsession with phenomenal or empirical violence. This is not simply a question of "mere shock" in a general, "spectacular-apolitical" sense (that is, the faux-transgression of categorical norms activating a likewise faux-liminal "thrill"), but rather one that comes to bear on teasing from the cluttered world picture the less-than-ideal, the ignoble and ignored elements of experience that fall into the very out-of-field of those frames within which consciousness itself is bound. In other words, while the cinema's general aptitude for and categorical affinity with the violent certainly informs its

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(primarily bourgeois) spectator, bringing to noetic and experiential reality the violence which has been absented to it, the cinema both casts a bright light on the "blind spots of the mind" and directly engages the material reality of its time.

attraction to what are clearly the already-spectacular and overwhelming phenomena which themselves "upset the mind" (that is, empirical or spectacular violence), it also works in the other direction, highlighting those conditions of experience that, perceived as incidental details, inconsequential ephemera, or abject trivialities, are indeed more disruptive, more violent once forced upon and into consciousness.

Despite the multiple forces that subtend the cinema's revelatory potentialities, the persistence and insistence of this revelatory drive is such that it can be recognized even within our contemporary context and its cinema, where even the most generous of appraisals must note a definite movement in quite the opposite direction. Even within late capitalism's spectacularized arrangements and economies, commercial cinema (and more than simply "the camera"[49]) has retained its innate potential to highlight and set apart even those necessarily hidden violences that fall into the scotomae of consciousness and experience – and even that of the persistently privileged, protected, and pedestalized bourgeois subject. In our contemporary and local context, Martin Scorsese perhaps most fully embraces these modes of revelation, while at the same time shoring up their immanent limitations. Consider, for example, those fleeting, "throw-away" moments in both *Taxi Driver* (1976) and its diptych *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999), glimpses through the "blind drive" of a passing automobile window (in the former, alternately from the perspective of Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro) or the camera-as-absent-passenger, in the latter, more directly from that of ambulance driver Frank Pierce (Nicolas Cage), surveying his inevitable quarry) of the nocturnal violence of the urban-metropolitan – and by this, indissolubly proletariat – streets: prostitutes and Johns slapped about, dealers and junkies tackled, and countless noncontextualized encounters and expressions of rage caught *in medias res*, all captured with a gaze not so much dispassionate (there *is* a politics at work here, deriving from Scorsese's characteristically resigned admixture of both compassion and contempt for the human condition and the conditioned human) as appropriately *ambivalent* – *"There it is."*

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[49] As Comolli argues in "Machines of the Visible," the common metonymic reduction of the entire apparatus to its most visible and emblematic component (the camera) – a reduction that enables the whole of Kracauer's theorization – is problematic because, like ideology and many modes of ideology-critique, it puts out of consideration the vaster, more complex, and less-visible components and processes active in the production and reception of the film-text. Whether this threatens to undo the entirety of the ontology of camera-reality Kracauer advances is something of an open question. Clearly, Kracauer understands that the camera and what it registers are only one side of the token: the side truest to the medium's essential photographic nature (the locus of the realist tendency, which expresses its ontological truth and function), if not the strongest (vis-à-vis the formative tendency manifest in staging, framing, and especially narrative editing). These matters comes directly to bear on the contemporary narrative fiction film – that is, the completely staged film, fully abandoned to the formative tendency – where such "chance elements" onto which the camera locks its revelatory/realist gaze are thoroughly *without* chance, bearing at best the *image of chance*, the *image of realism*. Clearly, whenever such revelations are present today in narrative films it is by design and direction, if not always by purpose. With everything in its "intended and necessary" place in the grand architecture of the fiction film-text, the pure and immediate emergence of the chance event is of course absented, as also is the unmediated arrangement of bodies and relations as one might find in unstaged material. Nonetheless, the accidental emerges here not as a product of some "tyranny of chance," but rather in those intentional arrangements meant to replicate reality and real relations: these staged arrangements, of course, may tend toward the utopian or otherwise fantastic, but nonetheless always still reveal something of the social truth, even in exaggeration – as with Scorsese – or in complete abstraction into mytho-affirmative allegories – as with Lucas or Spielberg.

In both films, despite the degree to which its perspectives are loosely justified as direct points of view, the camera *itself* functions as a witness and presents its testimony as it travels through these scenes of urban existence, not so much fleeing the violence that surrounds it but mutely, keenly observing its omnipresence in passing, refusing to turn away: actively, interestedly framing it, but without intervention, fear, or judgment. The spatial problematic entailed in these acts of recording is particularly interesting: violence is revealed from the foreground to the deepest recesses of the frame, and all less in direct apposition to the proscenium of the interior space of the automobile – that is, as neatly-staged events in a two-dimensional screen-space, framed by the window for observation from the seat-space – than as parallaxed fields, shifting perceptual planes consisting of separated, but not separable, dimensions of action and motion, a pulsating dimensionality of the world in untamable motion as seen by and from the semi-protected and segregated space of the camera's vision (the automobile as isolating as the camera obscura, and like the train whose windows protocinematically opened upon framed gazes to the outside, lens and window glass alike).[50] The violence revealed in such moments of vision qua vision of moments is thus decidedly not of the spectacular, sensationalized, or "gratuitous" type, however simultaneously compelling and terrifying the sights may be: they are not established in themselves as scenes, but rather themselves establish the scene, realizing it by drawing the camera's attention, and through this indeed make both the scene and the camera's role and investment in capturing it possible.[51]

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[50] In Scorsese's films, automobiles are regularly spaces from which violence is seen (as mobile camera obscuras) or in which violence occurs but is never seen within; in either case, they represent for Scorsese a kind of metaphor for the bourgeois relation to violence so many of his films actively work to problematize, attending these conditions of isolation (don't look in, mind your own business), distance (transparent separation), obviousness (in plain sight but ignored), and fleetingness (passing by in constant movement).

These moments, now established as such by the camera's interested intervention, reveal not simply *a* texture, *a* set of details that complete the urban-underclass *mise-en-scène*, but their integrality to very weaving of the fabric itself, bustling and alive with a violence that, before Scorsese's lens, is less elementally animalistic in the barbaric or uncivilized sense than in the sense of intrinsic *necessity*, of "fight and/or flight." It is a necessity not activated by some internal and inhering urge or impulse to violence on the part of a characteristically animalistic underclass, but rather, in an economy of forces, as an explosive consequence of a greater, immanent violence pressed down, as it were, upon them from all sides: the consequences of the perpetuative culture of victimization and this latter's inevitability from specific disenfranchising social arrangements made legible in – and *as* – camera-reality, as *cinema.* Scorsese's baroque tableaux of the decay of *the* American city (New York), that idealist metonymic model of capitalist ethos, industrial triumph, and the fulfilled promise of the American liberal-democratic experiment, reveals this rotten and festering state most clearly in these detailed snapshots-in-motion, these fleeting glimpses of the normally unseen, these *ignoble, ignorable but undeniable moments* organized into nightmarish but compelling travelogues of a wasteland populated with so many hollow(ed) men: Kracauer's *tableaux vivants* as *tableaux mordants.*

But what these sequences also reveal are the objective limitations of this revelatory drive in the Hollywood film-text, limitations not least imposed by the second-level formative demands of narrative clarity and unity. In both films, the acts, the perspectives, and the images presented are more or less the same, more or less exchangeable, and more or less purely objective in their character: for all they reveal, they are fundamentally ambivalent, and as such narratologically indeterminate; only the drivers' interior monologues – disembodied voices synthesizing the meaning of the images from an entirely separate, entirely subjective plane – provide any substantive measure of directional and valuative commentary on the images in question.[52] These commentaries, moreover, are radically different – Bickle's apprehension one of disgust and rage, Pierce's of wearied and despaired pity – and consequently, crucially, so too become the images themselves, the very nature of that which they reveal. In what appears as an uneasy triumph of the medium's formative tendencies over its realist tendencies, these extra-diegetic elements at once put the images in clearer focus and, by this same operation, qualitatively change their experience and discursive character: that is, they reframe the images *qua images* to different, even dissonant registers of contemporary experience and consciousness, to different conceptions (to again invoke Jameson's Heideggarian terms) of space and Being.

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[51] The same certainly holds true for the narratives themselves (which I am not explicitly concerned with here): without this teeming structural violence, we have no Travis Bickle (who clearly is a product of his environment, a perverse *Übermensch*), we have no Frank Pierce (who identifies himself, and in the narrative's Christian-redemptive allegory is fully identified, with his job: the crushing task of rescuing and resurrecting the victims of this violence), we consequently have no film to speak of. And while this is certainly not unique to Scorsese's films – indeed, are not all narratives bound in violence, its threat, its overcoming? – the degree to which its presence as such, its omnipresence, is foregrounded is relatively unique, not least in its characteristic and ambivalent matter-of-factness.

So while on the one hand this reframing works in concert with the preexisting revelatory drive by way of synthesizing and concretizing perspective within the totality of the film narrative, on the other hand this subjective element reframes the raw material further, displaces it from the purview of the mechanical apparatus to the recognizably human registers of voice and valuation, inviting and facilitating identification and agreement with the spoken/thought assessment of the images rather than a direct reflection on their objective character. If nothing else, the directive force of these commentaries shores up the degree to which the dispassionate "factuality" of such images does *not* forge or guarantee a straight line to consciousness (i.e., it sets these "objective" visions in an objectivized externalized context – an ambivalent state of both revealing the character of violence in these terms and keeping them on those grounds), and that the medium's power of revelation, held within the image "itself," is always tenuous and itself subject to redirection: in other words, revealing not just the breadth of what violence may be, but also, in the foregrounding of the subjective element, the indissoluble conditions of our distanced and often arbitrary relation to it.

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[52] On the one hand, this is a mode of "subjective description" of a sort that traverses the threshold within literary modes of representation noted by Jameson on Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* in *Marxism and Form* (see particularly pp. 191-205). On the other hand, these descriptive moments shore up the degree to which the literary and the cinematic are so very different in their treatments of such phenomena: there is a poetry in their appraisals, to be sure (even Bickle's tirades have a beat sensibility and syncopation), but it is one that is always-already at a remove from the immediacy of the witnessed events, as metacommentaries which in language replicate one of Scorsese's favored devices, the "god's-eye camera" (most evident in *Taxi Driver's* denouement, the unjustified overhead tracking shot surveying the carnage, the perspective of a divine but melancholically distanced eye of justice arrived too late).

Obviously, then, there is nothing "unmediated" or "objective" (in the pure sense) at stake here, in either the mobilization of these images in the totality of the film-text or even the images themselves. But that these moments are staged as profilmic events is, in the end, of little consequence to what they articulate and reveal: they evoke an immediacy of a real*istic* scenario, of violence not only *imminent* but *immanent.* At the same time, the subjective mooring of these apprehensions (by way of either their spoken commentary or in the conflation of the camera-image with their own direct points of view) is also relatively immaterial: in their own witnessing and relation of the violent realities before their observing and perceptive eyes, Bickle is a camera, Pierce is a camera, and the viewing subject, dissolved and drawn into their perceptual realities, is also a camera. What ultimately *does* matter – particularly as regards the real and ascribed im-mediacy of violence and its encounter, and even moreso when we also consider that of the ideological and imaginary structures within which it is bound – is that these images of immediacy and factuality appear and affect as such, despite and indeed because of the obviousness of the active framing taking place.

It is thus that even in the cinema's most obviously staged, patently ridiculous, or grotesquely excessive scenarios, images, or events that we can understand an objective-immediate relation to what is presented, regardless of what is presented, so long as it is presented directly to sight: as Paul Virilio states so simply (if with a pronounced and bitter Derridean irony), "Everything visible appears to us in the light, we believe our eyes and the light calmly appears to us as *the truth of the world.*"[53] And it is in casting this "certain other light," to use Derrida's terms, that the cinema may record, present, and lay bare not only things "as they are," but also, more fundamentally, *as they appear to be*: presenting the objects of its affection and apprehension to consciousness as they appear to consciousness, not outside their multiple means, modes, and degrees of mediation, but fully within them, embraced. In this, its revelations are firmly in the register of the political, not simply because they reveal something, but also because they do so with a full disclosure of the mechanics of that revelation; to recall Agamben's astute formulation, "*(p)olitics is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the act of making a means visible as such.*"[54] Thus, while the camera is "in itself" simply a "cold witness," a tool that imparts its power of distance on whomever stands before its images or behind its lens,[55] the text arising from this "distortionless" and "purely mechanical" interface with reality becomes not only a concrete expression of historicity and materiality, but also, with the same clarity of presentation, of the inextricably subjective nature of reality and its apprehension.

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[53] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 38.

[54] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 116-117. Emphases his.

It would be a mistake, then, to associate the *distortionless* quality that Kracauer ascribes the medium in the recording and revealing of violent phenomena, events, and arrangements with a likewise *dispassionate* or *disinterested* quality, as though the camera were that simultaneously omniscient and detached force of observation that it so often appears and presents itself to be (if, of course, it appears or presents itself at all). Quite to the contrary: the "distortionless" quality of its gaze and representations is rather precisely a product and effect of both its basic affinity with and obsessional interest in such "raw material" (as phenomenological matter in general, manifest not only but particularly as violence) and as a condition, expression, and actualization of the medium's ontological nature: to peer, focus, arrange, and magnify. In the end, as photography's and cinema's *raison d'être*, those phenomenon that either evade perception in their temporal scope or material scale, or, as Kracauer puts it, overwhelm consciousness in general are not only in the specialized purview of such visual technologies: *they are also their condition of possibility, and even, ultimately, necessity.*

But to the extent that such "raw material" – from a "limited violence" to sensational or sensorially overwhelming material to the abjected underside of conscious experience – is ontologically custom-fit to the mechanics of the apparatus, there is also an underlying and abiding tension that cannot be fully overcome, insofar as in the case of commercial narrative cinema the revelatory and deeply disturbing are so often also antithetical to its most basic programmatic ends: the consistent, ordered, and regulated space of the narrative film-text qua affirmative commodity. Consequently, there is a threshold, a limit that cannot be transgressed, an event horizon from which the medium cannot escape, where even its *own* violences might be the subject of its revelatory gaze, irrevocably disclosed. That point is not simply one where the re/presentations of whatever violent content enters into the excessive or unpleasurable, or even when "too much" is inevitably revealed about the structural violence of conditions of existence and experience: rather, it is precisely that at which the cinema's *integral* violences are foregrounded to the degree that it can no longer function as unproblematic entertainment, where its false transparencies become legible as such. Once the illusions of causality, continuity and stability that this cinema imposes on its subjects and subject matter – and never more precariously than on violence – begin to fold, all that remains is the clearest picture of what lies beneath the surface sheen: matrices of violence, intrinsic to its form, essential to its function, and tenuously regimented and contained.

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[55] That the camera endows its power of distance upon the cameraperson is clear, and the ancillary connotations this entails – that the camera also endows its sovereign violence upon the bearer, in the process fully becoming an instrument of violence – will be a major point of discussion in the next section. It does bear noting, however, that the objectivizing position of the camera-operator (as a kind of charged parody of the Vertovian Kino-Eye) is what lies behind the most pornographic displays of violence manifest in American culture today: not in cinema, but on television, in the long-running "family-friendly" program *America's Funniest Home Videos*, where all manner of injury – some slapstick, some quite serious – is not only displayed for laughs and shock. What is interesting about these videos is less their violence (or indeed their entertainment value) than the fact that the cameraperson recording the event – usually a friend or family member of the victim – rarely if ever puts the camera down to either prevent the impending injury or to assist in its aftermath. The ethical distance of the camera, while clearly of a piece with its distortionless or even dispassionate character, is also clearly of a piece with the requisite disregard for the ethical in the kinds of objectifying relations the camera establishes in the fact of recording.

INTEGRALITY & INSTRUMENTALITY:
PRINCIPLES OF INHERENCE & INTERAFFECTIVITY

> *I sometimes wonder if films are not more of a poison than a tonic, in the end. If these little flashes of light in the night are really worth all the pain. When I cannot get that moment of truth where you feel yourself opening up like a flower, I absolutely loathe the bloody camera. I can just feel this black hole eyeing me, sucking me in, and I feel like smashing it to smithereens.*[56]
>
> Nastassja Kinski
> *Studio*

> *The cinematic machine is lethal; it, too, murders and dissects.*[57]
>
> Kaja Silverman
> "Suture"

Having gone to some length to establish the ontological relation between the cinematic apparatus and (for the most part phenomenological and empirical) violence, we might now begin to answer the question of the title: in what ways can we understand the cinema as a "violent machine"? It is obvious enough that the cinema has a unique affective capacity to inflict certain discomforts, from actuating extreme subjective states such as suspense, terror, or bewilderment to approximating or replicating the *experience* of violence, of being caught up in its midst: that is, in providing something of a *direct image of violence* in not simply revelatory-depictive, but also affective-experiential terms. To these ends, the cinema again works not to strip away those subjective filters which work against an "objectively accurate image" of violence, but instead to highlight them, with the distortions imposed by whatever technique contributing to its own revelation-effect. As Kracauer notes of such "special modes of reality,"

> films may expose physical reality as it appears to individuals in extreme states of mind generated by such events as we have mentioned, mental disturbances, or any other external or internal causes. Supposing such a state of mind is provoked by an act of violence, then the camera often aspires to render the images which an emotionally upset witness or participant will form of it. These images also belong among the cinematic subjects. They are distorted from the viewpoint of the detached observer; and they differ from each other according to the varying states of mind in which they originate.[58]

The apparatus' capacity to approximate the fully subjective experience of violence is perhaps best illustrated and actualized in the recreation of the Normandy landing opening

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[56] Cited in Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 52.
[57] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 211.
[58] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 58.

Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), a sequence which mobilizes a vast array of derealizing cinematic devices in the service, paradoxically enough, of presenting an *affectively realistic* image of the chaos and terror of combat. Within the experience of war, Virilio notes, "... the static sense of the world has come to an incomprehensible end. 'Beyond a certain threshold,' Clausewitz remarks, 'the light of reason moves in a different medium and is reflected in a different manner.'"[59] The devices Spielberg uses to this end comprise a veritable catalogue of affective standards: the handheld camera (signifying both objective-documentarian immediacy and the subjective, insofar as the presence of the camera-as-held is always implied), disjunctive cutting and whip-pans between perspectives (which redouble the profilmic chaos of battle), periods of slow motion linked with localized individual perspectives (suggesting the insular and intensely focused character of perception in the face of overwhelming phenomena), and even the direct point of view of anonymous infantrymen as they are shot, drown, or fall dying from their wounds. Much like *Potemkin*'s Odessa Steps sequence, the denotative clarity of spatial relations – the distance from beachhead to bunkers, the relative position of Allied to Axis troops, etc. – and of the strategic maneuvers of the battle are subordinate to the construction and exploitation of the subjective image:[60] chaos, and the terror of its pure experience, is the object to be faithfully replicated here, not necessarily the objective mechanics of the battle itself.

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[59] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 48. Virilio's explanatory footnote at this point speaks volumes: "In *Cahiers du cinéma* (No. 311), Samuel Fuller argued that it was impossible to film the Normandy landing because you couldn't decently film yards of intestine on a beach. Apart from the fact that dead people do not take well to being photographed (see the pictures of assassinations or traffic accidents), Fuller's witticism suggests that military-industrial films cannot *decently* be horror films, since in one way or another they are intended to embellish death. Moreover, the Allied landing acutely re-posed the problem of documentary realism. Today everyone knows that there were not yards of intestine on the Normandy beaches and that the landing was a remarkable and technically difficult operation – not because of German resistance (which was virtually non-existent), but because of the adverse weather and complicated Normandy countryside. Thus, *in order to make up the numbers*, the Allied commanders threw their men into operations like the storming of Hoc Point, which were as suicidal as they were spectacular. In 1962, when Zanuck made his fictional documentary with fifty stars, 20,000 extras and six directors, the action took place on the Ile de Ré or in Spain, where the beaches were 'grander' than those of Arromanche. This immortalization of a battle that had never happened ensured that *The Longest Day* was a great box-office success." (94 n.3)

[60] I take such an image-type simply as a combinatory of localized point of view and relative derealization. As Steven Heath notes in "Narrative Space": "Subjective images can be many things; Mitry, for example, classifies them into five major categories: 'the purely mental image (more or less impracticable in the cinema), the truly subjective or analytical image (i.e. what is looked at without the person looking), which is practicable in small doses; the semi-subjective or associated image (i.e. the person looking + what is looked at, which is in principle simply a variety of the mental image but, when presented in the form of a flash-back with commentary, allows for a specific filmic treatment which is far more successful than in the case of other mental images.' The point-of-view shot includes 'the semi-subjective or associated image' (its general mode) and 'the truly subjective or

Equally significant to this end is a subtle but consistently engrained effect provided by the camera itself: in an effort to replicate the flickering, jittery images of the era's 16mm military field cameras and the newsreel footage they provided, Spielberg modified the angle of his cameras' shutters from ninety to forty-five degrees on axis. From this characteristically postmodern impulse to create a second-level simulation of events remembered most directly through other images (the simulacrum of the war-experience, the cinematic image of its experiential reality that, in its fullest form in contemporary modes and means of warfare and its apprehension, has today become its entire reality), the resulting images bear a peculiar stroboscopy, relaying a perceptual reality not marked by *any* kind of continuity (of perspective, to be sure, but even across individual frames) but rather by a derealization and discontinuity at the very base, in the very mechanism of perception.[61] This particular effect not only further derealizes the field of perception to the end of approximating a particular "special mode of reality" (the technical side of things being the most obvious, as is the desaturated, high-contrast quality of the image from silver-nitrate retention in negative processing), not only introduces another layer of restless agitation into the chaos of the perceptual-experiential field presented onscreen (the jerky quality particularly affects the recording of movement, simultaneously sharpening and undoing it, with the most recognizable human gestures rendered as the movement of marionettes in a *ballet mécanique*): it also foregrounds, at the very level of the continuous progression of frames, the intervention of the apparatus and, moreover (given the genealogy of the technique), frames the experience of war, indeed war and experiential perception themselves, independently and

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analytical image' (its pure mode, as it were) in that classification but not necessarily any of the other categories (a memory sequence, for instance, need not contain any point-of-view shots)' what is 'subjective' in the point-of-view shot is its spatial positioning (its place), not the image or the camera. … (A) true subjective image would effectively need to mark its subjectivity *in the image itself.* (…) They … depend exactly on some recognizable – marking – distortion of the 'normal' image, a narratively motivated aberration of vision of some kind or another (the character is drugged, intoxicated, shortsighted, terrified …). The implication of this, of course, is then the strength of the unmarked image as a constant third person – the vision of picture and scene, the Quattrocento view, Burch's 'voyeur' position – *which is generally continued within point-of-view shots themselves*; the point-of-view shot is marked as subjective in its emplacement but the resulting image is still finally (or rather firstly) objective, the objective sight of what is seen from the subject position assumed." (399-400)

[61] Certainly, the sequence also has an organizing narrative pull, to which these potentially revelatory (and certainly discomfiting) affective maneuvers ultimately and systematically become subordinate: in its persistent returns to Capt. Miller (Tom Hanks, the only recognizable face from the outset) and a handful of other known actors who emerge as the ranks are decimated, the sequence constitutes a grand scheme of character attrition ("important characters" emerge as others are cut down) in service of narrative and archetypal necessities, and ultimately framed as cinematic experience with its final, starkly composed shot following Miller's concluding phrase: "what a view". We will consider the broader implications of this maneuver in a later chapter.

conjunctively considered, fully within the terms of the cinematic. Just as in the surrealistic quality of witnessing the explosion of the atomic bomb over Nagasaki in his adaptation of J.G. Ballard's memoir *Empire of the Sun* (1987), Spielberg takes Ballard at his word, and without need for irony: *"it was like a movie."*

This sequence and the countless others like it begin (if only that) to answer to *how* the cinema *is* violent: that is, how violence is *integral to* the cinema – not simply in such experiential approximations of violence, but in each and every facet of the apparatus' function as an *instrumental precondition.* Important as they are, these "subjective" and affective maneuvers are ancillary, coextensive effects of an already-present and active violence, simply amplified and modulated to a specific affective end. To be sure, recognizing and isolating such an integral violence, let alone explaining or arguing for it, is difficult given the terms of the violent imaginary and the general (and telling) resistance to name and recognize structural and structuring violences as such. As argued in the previous chapter, violence is most frequently characterized as the externalized, necessarily visible manifestation and distillation of power in its instrumental (i.e., repressed/repressive, regulated/regulative, and directed/directive) form: an *act* which, by definition, requires an actor/agent, an acted upon/victim, and finally an explicitly posited, rationally or affectively justified intent or end. The problem before the argument that the cinema entails a certain violence or set of violences is the same as that before the apprehension of structural and systemic violence: by these limited yet invested terms, without an agent (the apparatus, invisible), a victim (the spectator, pleased), a motive (the open beneficence of the commodity exchange), or visible or otherwise demonstrable ends (no scars save those already present upon the soul, retorn at every turn but unseen and unplainted), how can this relation – let alone this machine – be called "violent"?

Engaging this question and its basic premises, Kaja Silverman's passing but explicit and unapologetic characterization of the apparatus as "lethal, murderous, and dissecting" casts her now-canonic theses on the psychodynamics of the apparatus-text-spectator constellation in a most useful light: she indemnifies the medium as an intrinsically violent machine, an active and interested enactor of violence, and not "simply" an apt representer or reproducer thereof. Moreover, in suggesting that there is a violence integral to the apparatus that informs and defines the medium as simultaneously an instrument and active perpetrator of violence, Silverman's pointed assertion makes the unnamed violence inherent in all her referents' theories of subjectification and cinematic spectatorship explicit and unambiguous as such. By exploring Silverman's argument with an eye toward its somewhat *sub rosa* critique of the violence of cinematic subjectivization, we can understand that the cinema's abiding relation to violence is not merely a matter of aptitude for or basic attraction to that which either presents itself or may be revealed "as violence," however crucial this fundamental affinity is to the overall equation.[62] Rather, it is to say again (if in somewhat different terms) that representation alone is not the key to opening the question of cinema's abiding relationship with phenomenal or empirical violence, nor with the panoply of violences both intrinsic and extrinsic to the functions and functioning of the apparatus.

In "Suture," Silverman maps out two overlapping processes which can help us explore this cinema's integral violence: one extending from its general aptitude in the capture and transmutation of profilmic "reality" into something specifically seductive and pleasurable (the unified images of classical narrative form), and another in the interpellative and enunciative constitution of the viewing subject. Both emblematic of and instrumental in the perpetuation of the economy of violence proper to representation itself, the cinema's integral violences are multilayered and additive, inhering first in processes of production (the initial dissection and collection of fragmentary moments, and the subsequent distillation of momentary fragments of raw footage into the paradoxical smoothness of the narrative text), again in processes of transmission and reception (the point of contact and exchange between text and subject, inasmuch as its logics of rupture and substitution psychically and materially contribute to the constitutive violence of subjectivization), and finally in the ideological and material effects *of* that subject-formation (the conscious and unconscious attitudes, practices, and relations both lived and felt that extend beyond the individual subject to the cinephrenic world-picture organized around it).

The violence integral to production derives quite directly from the processes of recording and revealing that for Kracauer mark the medium's ontological singularity. If recording does not necessarily result in the violence of revelation, it certainly always entails its own coldly instrumental but nonetheless interested violence: the violence of *découpage*, of the act of framing reality for the ends of representation. Independently of any consequent "revelation-effect," the act of recording is inaugurally violent, a mode of capture that instrumentally, purposefully, and ruthlessly selects and absents: its focus determining a specific reality, bending it to a specific end, and doing so by both excluding and entailing the "present absence" of the out of field which constitutes not only a forced spatial absention, but also a threat that is unignored, beckoning and taunting from the limit of the presented but always-already accounted for in its containment, held (appropriately enough) in reserve.[63] Coordinate with the drive to record and reveal, the resulting out of field corresponds with and confronts scotomae in both the image and in the imagination, both limits preconditioned by the medium's promise and seemingly limitless power to reveal all. And most immediately, the profilmic body – and particularly, as many (including Silverman) have noted, the female body as an intrinsic spectacle for the phallocentric gaze – is no less subject to these cuts and rendings: the close-up, the *plan américain*, and so forth slicing the observed body into disengaged chunks, a procrustean forensic pornography of the human form which simultaneously frames and derealizes the body-as-object in its translation into image (a kind of kitchen-prep for psychosexual cannibalism).

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[62] The fundamentally narcissistic force of attraction, even admiration, whereby that which is violent is drawn to violence, will be attended presently as a condition of *obsession*.

From this, there is a secondary violence at the level of production, complementary and additive to the first, in the re/arrangement of these slices of captured reality in *montage*: the production of the film-text as an active production of meaning from collected materiel, the Frankensteinian imposition of narrative form on the formlessness of shattered fragments. In this, we might also recognize (as Kracauer does) a violence against the medium's ontological fundaments in the formative imposition of narrative syntax and conscription thereto upon the medium: reducing the medium to an instrument of narrative delivery, constraining its revelatory realist tendencies to accord with a bourgeois formative theatricality, and instrumentalizing the tendential violence of cinematic montage to purely affirmative ends (the most pronounced being a holistic diegetic image of an inaccessible, and for this all the more desirable, ideality divorced from the messy exigencies of lived, experienced reality: the utopian *ultima ratio* for war, revolution, and cinema alike).

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[63] Silverman illustrates this point with an extended passage from Heath's "Narrative Space," which corresponds to a crucial Deleuzo-Guattarian formulation of the systolic and diastolic forces of contemporary capitalism and its procedural axiomatization that opens Chapter Four. As Heath says, "the work of classical continuity is not to hide or ignore off-screen space but, on the contrary, to contain it, to regularize its fluctuation in a constant movement of reappropriation. It is this movement that defines the rules of continuity and the fiction of space they serve to construct, the whole functioning according to a kind of metonymic lock in which off-screen space becomes on-screen space and is replaced in turn by the space it holds off, each joining over the next. The join is conventional and ruthlessly selective (it generally leaves out of account, for example, the space that might be supposed to be masked at the top and bottom of the frame, concentrating much more on the space at the sides of the frame or on that 'in front,' 'behind the camera,' as in variations of field/reverse field), and demands that the off-screen space recaptured must be 'called for,' must be 'logically consequential,' must arrive as 'answer,' 'fulfillment of promise' or whatever (and not as difference or contradiction) – must be narrativized." (As cited in Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 213-214.)

Finally, then, is the violence that structures and inheres in the encounter with this re/organized, unified, instrumentalized product(ion): the violence inherent in the interpellative reconstitution of the viewing subject vis-à-vis the narrative cinematic text, in the latter's propulsive dialectic of plenitude and lack and in the former's submission to narrative techniques that are as much tactical as syntactical. The violence that is at the same time of and exerted upon narrative cinema is conceptually, materially, and practically bound up in a vicious economy of investment and expenditure and in a narratological/teleological mode that is less structurally Aristotelian than suffused with a Weberian sensibility of bourgeois ethics that shapes desire itself (and, indeed, blurs the already indistinct distinction between those modes of desire attended by psychoanalytic and Marxist/materialist discourses). The force and exigencies of narrative itself organize both the empirical and structural violences at stake not only to its own terms, but to its own ends, and the film-text is a product that extends its own productive capacities derived from and defined by a series of violent machinations.

Extending from and actualized by those at the level of production, this "ultimate" violence returns us to the subject and its status as the *product* (if not the *victim*) of the violent processes and procedures of subjectification that inform the bulk of Silverman's cinematic reformulation of suture. "The concept of suture," Silverman reminds us, in the most general sense "attempts to account for the means by which subjects emerge within discourse."[64] In her opening citation of Jacques-Alain Miller, she notes more specifically that

> (s)uture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse ... it figures there as the element which is lacking in the form of a stand-in. For, while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension – the general relation of lack to the structure of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of.[65]

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[64] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 199-200.

[65] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 200.

From this basic definition of the subject's relation to discourse as one of absolute dependency, inescapable conscription, and infinite debt, Silverman unpacks the cinematic concept of suture proposed by Oudart in terms both Lacanian (where suture replicates the continual reinsertion of the subject into the symbolic order) and Althusserian (where the apparatus' and film-texts' interpellative force replicates and reinscribes that of ideology, the cinematic apparatus as ISA).[66] While the specific terms and implications of each situation obviously differ, their logics and results are at base the same: suture both continually reestablishes and requires as its enabling condition a fundamentally violent relation, grounded in the most terribly inequitable structure of dissymmetrical exchange. Inasmuch as we have proposed that violence is qualitatively manifest in and manifested by unequal exchange, and that we may find violence wherever there is a marked (if not always apparent) imbalance between forces, wherever one power is exercised to the detriment of one and the gain of another, both the conditions and the effects of the cinema-spectator compact described in suture are indubitably violent, as the relatively unmitigated and unanswered exercise of force over another, even if that other is oneself; its form and result alike is subjugation, freely accepted and otherwise. By these terms, suture (and the desire for it, to say nothing of the desire for empirical violence by way of images that upset the mind) is as reliant upon a determining, monological structure of subjectivation as a determined spectatorial masochism. Bearing the true mark of the properly subjectified in the adherence to a formal contract, the spectator's sutured relation to the film-text – relinquishing control over the pleasure and pain received, gaining pleasure even through the pain in that relinquishment, channeling desire through circuits that are in theory safely insulated but nonetheless beyond all predictable determination, and ceding all claims to aggression or animosity toward the locus of that determination – is masochism quite literally played out *in dramatis*: as Deleuze remarks, "Masochism is above all formal and dramatic: this means that its peculiar pleasure-pain complex is determined by a particular kind of formalism, and its experience of guilt a specific story."[67] The cinema's visible theater of relations holds and requires a violence that is *undeniably present*, *undeniably active*, and even *formally acknowledged.*

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[66] While this is not the place to advance a full argument to this end, perhaps it is sufficient to say that at least the cinematic concept of suture allows for such varying interpretations and applications, from the psychoanalytic (as with Lacan) to the historical-materialist (as with Althusser). As Silverman notes in a critical aside, "It is important to note that although Althusser's definition of the real is congruent with Marxism, it is also by no means incompatible with our own semiotic argument, in that like the symbolic order it is a field of relationships." (218) In other words, the concept of suture Silverman advances here is not one which is necessarily tied to the psychoanalytic tradition from which it was originally formulated and in relation to which it is still primarily identified: rather, as a structure of determining relations and dependencies, the provides a means by which any structure of discursive relations may be understood – in Foucauldian terms, the concept of suture advanced here is *diagrammatic* (a function that is "detached from any specific use"), and as such has a utility beyond a psychoanalytic "proof of concept" for understanding the dynamic violences that inhere in and cohere processes of subjectivization of whatever sort (linguistic, economic, and so forth). Moreover, hers is an immanentist concept, and particularly in its Althusserian modulation, which holds, contrary to the Lacanian-psychoanalytic form, that "identifications [and, from the other end of things, enunciations] (n)ever occur spontaneously or outside of the symbolic order" (216-217; brackets mine), and hence the very notion of the subject itself cannot be understood in terms of any presubjective originary or unbroken state, but rather that all terms involved are, like the subject, always-already within the terms and bounds of cultural processes, formations, and exigencies. And while this also risks the same kind of totalizing tendency which Benveniste might find in the psychoanalytic concept of the symbolic order, it crucially retains the Benvenistian potentiality for a politicality in the subject that turns away from the site of enunciation/interpellation (the Althusserian "bad subject" as a political construct arising from productive fissures in the structure of ideology, the psychoanalytic version of the same essentially a negatively-defined pathology).

This violence of enunciation and subjectivation most obviously inheres at the fundamental level of spectatorial identification: the surrender of the self to an/other, be it the protagonist-figure or, more expansively, the apparatus itself as a technological and symbolic force. Silverman notes that

> the representations with which we recognize ourselves are clearly manufactured elsewhere, at the point of the discourse's origin. In the case of cinema, that point of origin must be understood as both broadly cultural (i.e. as the symbolic field) and as specifically technological (i.e. as encompassing the camera, the tape-recorder, the lighting equipment, the editing room, the script, etc.).[68]

Here, the apparatus is primarily considered not simply in its technological character (that is, an instrument of representation), but fully as a technology of symbolic and subjective articulation, recalling Jean-Louis Baudry's claim that "(t)he entire cinematographic apparatus is aimed at provoking … a subject-effect and not a reality-effect."[69] Contra Kracauer's revelatory idealism, however, the apparatus is not to be understood simply an essentially neutral machine in apposition to the charged field of the symbolic and cultural: rather, it is an interested and invested means of the latter's arrangement and articulation that, in its machinations, retains and maintains preexisting economies of ideological, psychological, material, and experiential relations. Again, the ready instrumentalization of the apparatus suggests (as Baudry has argued most forcefully) that the medium's characteristic functions and drives open themselves *equally* to their appropriation, equally to one violence as to another.

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[67] Deleuze & Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, 95.

[68] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 197.

[69] A consistent thesis throughout his writings on the apparatus, this terse iteration is cited without specific source information as an epigraph to Elsaesser, "Primary Identification and the Historical Subject: Fassbinder and Germany," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, 535.

This ambivalence is crucial, as it both informs the violence of the medium's subjectifying capacities and opens, if only by the slimmest of degrees, the potentiality for their non-correspondence with a programmatic ideological end. In the substitutive and subjectivizing processes of identification, Silverman recognizes not simply the self-immolation of the self, but also the emergence (or better, forging) of a "third subject" beyond the categories of the enunciating and enunciated subject: "the 'spoken subject' or projected viewer."[70] As she argues,

> (c)inema clarifies for us, in a way which the conversational model cannot, the distance which separates the speaking subject from the spoken subject, since it locates the first of these 'behind' the discourse, and the second 'in front' of the discourse. In other words, the speaking subject of the cinematic text is always situated at the site of production, while the spoken subject of that same text is most exemplarily found instead at the site of consumption.[71]

By way of Benveniste, she situates the notion of the subject at the intersection of these "two subjects," which constitutes at its nexus a procedural subjectivation not so far from that proposed in late Foucault and elaborated by Butler:

> Indeed, the subject has an even more provisional status in Benveniste's writings than it does in Lacan's, since it has no existence outside of the specific discursive moments in which it emerges. Thus subject must be constantly reconstructed through discourse – through conversation, literature, film, television, painting, photography, etc.[72]

This is a critical maneuver, because it introduces into the Lacanian algebra those factors of transience and immanence to be found in Althusser's historical materialist account of ideology and subjectification, including the possibility of the "bad subject":

> Benveniste's discontinuous subject may depend for its emergence upon already defined discursive positions, but it has the capacity to occupy multiple and even contradictory sites. This descriptive model thus enables us to understand the subject in more culturally and historically specific ways than that provided by Lacan – i.e. in terms of a range of discursive positions available at a given time, which reflect all sorts of economic, political, sexual, artistic, and other determinants, instead of in

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[70] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 198.
[71] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 198.
[72] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 199.

> terms of a monolithic symbolic order. It also implies the possibility of change, since the generation of new discursive positions implies a new subjectivity as well.[73]

This potential for "the possibility of change" in the form of "new subjectivities" is critical, presenting a fissure in forces of determination with determinate political potentialities. Yet despite the potential for an evasion of a subjective correspondence with the intended effects of the film-text (and, indeed, perhaps in response to this potential), at all levels of cinematic production and presentation, Silverman returns to and affirms an idea fundamental to Benjamin, Kracauer, Mitry, and a host of others: that "the camera insists on the primacy of its own point of view,"[74] an insistence that, while not necessarily translating into a full correspondence with the presumed and implied subject "on the receiving end," certainly tends toward that end, demanding surrender as a condition of inclusion and exchange, always asserting its interpellative power. In the immediacy of each shot's successive presentation, in each structuring absence, in each conversion of negation from which this paradoxical coherence arises, "this castrating coherence, this definition of a discursive position for the viewing subject which necessitates not only its loss of being, but the repudiation of alternative discourses, is one of the chief aims of the system of suture,"[75] and hence, one of the chief aims of a cinema defined by and conscripted to that system's terms.

Thus, despite its material and conceptual reliance on the *presence* of the subject (however conceived or constructed), the apparatus reveals itself as inheringly monological, as both the antithesis of discourse that Derrida has proclaimed the "worst violence" and the simulacrum of the dialectical ideality presupposed in the text-subject encounter: the camera is its own and only audience, the screen projecting its own and only ideal viewer. This constitutive univocality, these *tendentially totalizing* means of symbolic and subjective enunciation, sublate almost to the point of foreclosure the medium's coincident potentialities for free ideation, expression, and revelations to consciousness. One violence, we might say, working to undermine, undercut, and efface another: a schizophrenic and internecine war of light, one light (of the apparatus, the film projected and projecting its will) against another (the Derridean light of metaphysical critique, the Kracauerian light of revelation), a total war of all against all, from all sides, all played out on and through the subject in the discursive killing fields within which it finds itself "at home."

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[73] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 199.
[74] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 210.
[75] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 205-206.

And even when these formal/perspectival and identificatory/interpellative violences are foregrounded rather than concealed by means of illusions of continuity, and indeed especially so, we can recognize the degree to which both the cinema's instrumental violence and our desire to be subjected to it are central to any narrative film: as Silverman concludes,

> we want suture so badly that we'll take it at any price, even with the fullest knowledge of what it entails – passive insertions into pre-existing discursive positions (both mythically potent and mythically impotent); threatened losses and false recoveries; and subordination to the castrating gaze of a symbolic Other.[76]

This submission *to* submission, "at any price," is absolutely critical from either a psychoanalytic or materialist perspective of the violence of subjectification, inasmuch as it marks desire as much as a product of lack (however determined, from a symbolic order to commercial advertising) as coordinate with a certain necessary masochism, self-loathing, guilt: the desire for violence as always concomitant with the desire for its escape, both desires reinscribed, inculcated, and catered to in the narrative film. "In fact," Silverman notes,

> the more the operations of enunciation are revealed to the viewing subject, the more tenacious is its desire for the comfort and closure of narrative – the more anxious it well be to seek refuge within the film's fiction. In so doing, the viewing subject submits to cinematic signification, permits itself to be spoken by the film's discourse."[77]

In the end, the violence the cinematic apparatus procedurally entails and instrumentally enacts upon the subject is not merely a kind of "proof of concept" for Lacanian, Althusserian, or Benvenistian subjectification, but rather is revealed as integral to those concepts: the correspondences here are not limited to the heuristic exercises of analogy and illustration, but posited and demonstrated as mutually determining, instrumentally interaffective. And in this way (if not only in this way) we can more concretely posit the fundamental and analogous violence at the core of both cinema and capitalism, the structuring inequities in exchanges of time for money, attention for emotional investment, service for subsistence, subservience for self itself. The subject that "inserts itself" back into the chain of signification does so by force of conscription; even if willingly, it is under the gun of demand, the continual demand of the Other however defined: to forfeit in this exchange would entail the unthinkable forfeiture of meaning itself (in economistic terms: the cost/benefit analysis weighing a loss *on* investment against a full loss *of* investment). And most critically, the subject's ostensible "willingness" in this compact at all levels (from the implied contract in the purchase of the ticket to the comportion of conduct vis-à-vis internalized spectatorial codes to the psycho-material abandonments requisite for "the suture effect" and "enjoyment" alike) provides the most fundamental alibi for the cinema, setting its integral and instrumental violence in terms that would not, by any traditional, conservative, or legal definition, be considered as such.

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[76] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 212-213.

[77] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 213. This compact of submission and manipulation, of course, is something well-understood and readily exploited by filmmakers. As director Frank Darabont matter-of-factly relates in the DVD commentary for his film *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), when the audience knows they're being manipulated, they recoil and resent; when they don't realize their manipulation until after the fact, they appreciate it: "It's like going to pet a cat. If you go to pet a cat, the cat pulls away. I think that's how an audience is as well. If they feel like they're being manipulated, if they sense the strings being pulled, I think they resent it. But if you pull the strings…skillfully, they appreciate the manipulation. Everybody enjoys being affected by a story."

By Silverman's explicit account, we are thusly subjects of the cinema's integral and instrumental violence; in this implicit correspondence between the cinematic and the subjectifying, we might go so far as to elide this middle term entirely: in this world now organized like cinema, we are all subjects of violence, and moreover willing, docile, and complicit – by these terms inconsiderable as "victims," thus *by these terms there is no "violence" at stake here*. The implied and active consensuality of the encounter, coupled with the invisibility of the agent, its means, its motivations, and its ends, effectively prohibits us from calling it violence, however violent the terms may be, and thus permits, replicates, and perpetuates that violence, unspoken though plainly sensed and seen.

But this prohibition just as certainly cuts both ways. Where Silverman's account falls short is also precisely in its wholly accurate determinism, which just as certainly implicates the subject in these processes: for all its monology dependent (as we have suggested) on the mere presence of the subject, there remains a dialogic, participatory component here that is indistinguishable (this is what makes possible the fissures noted above). The problematic here is essentially ethical and political: the positioning of the subject as the product and victim of the cinema's subjectivizing force, in essence, also "lets the subject off the hook," and in its own way legitimates precisely the procedures at stake (the problem of abstract determinism which, rightly or wrongly, puts all matters "out of one's hands") and authorizes the extension of the spectacularized ethical non-relation to violence of whatever sort (which, while not to valorize the terms of the popular-public debate over the deterministic effects of "media violence" of whatever stripe, certainly speaks to those terms: the eminently parodizable alibi that "the movies made me what I am" finding its reiteration in the pandering to what essentially amounts to a theorization of victimization, however accurate that theorization's terms may be). While this ethico-dialectical quagmire opens on all kinds of incorrigible propositions that I care not to rehearse here (the irresolvable debates over the possibility of agency and responsibility in spectacular society, for example), the fundamental fact remains, as already suggested in Chapter One, that amongst the many "problems of violence" is one that bourgeois thought is least able to confront directly: the internalization and inculcation of attitudes and practices which make every subject complicit in extending the economy of violence, a notion that Silverman's account, as useful and productive as it is to understand the violence of the apparatus, only begins to hint at in its slight (and perhaps inevitably so) gestures toward establishing the more complex mechanics and dynamics at stake in every violent relation.

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To illustrate this point, we might examine its implications in the pleasures (which, however conditioned, disciplined, and inculcated, are quite active and real) that the film-text affords "in exchange" for spectatorial attention and investment, and particularly where the former's instrumental violence is literalized to the point where spectatorial engagement has no alibi in being "duped" or otherwise manipulated beyond complicity. Given its generalizable status as an instrument of violence, some of the most revealingly seductive moments the cinema offers are those where the camera is conflated with other, more immediately recognizable instruments of violence, be it a knife, as in *Psycho*, a fist, as in *Raging Bull*, or, as is most often the case, a gun. The justification for this longstanding equivocation can be traced back to Marey's protocinematic rifle-camera, which held in place of the bullet chamber a revolving photographic exposure plate that captured the life of its targeted objects with every click of the trigger, and as Paul Virilio suggests, the conflation has long been reciprocal: "Ever since sights were superimposed on gun-barrels," he says, "people have never stopped associating the uses of projectiles and light, that light which is the soul of gun-barrels."[78]

This association is particularly evident in the post-credit opening sequence of Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* (1971), where the crosshairs of a rifle scope survey the rooftop landscape, tracking its victim as she swims: simultaneously a parody and logical extension of the medium's compulsions to seek out and capture life in motion, this surveillant, scopic, piercing and unseen gaze is not "simply" observant or even voyeuristic but *predatory* in its intent, on the hunt for flesh, for blood. If there are necessary conceptual and practical conflicts in such a direct disclosure of the identity of the apparatus with active and interested violence, and via the identificatory and enunciative relay between apparatus and spectator also the latter's complicity therein, they are readily formally resolved. The occasional ruptures of this direct point of view – shots of the barrel of the gun as it sweeps the frame, of the figure behind the stock and scope, of the geographic relation between predator and prey, of the finger tentatively tapping the trigger, and so forth – work to disrupt such direct and directly pejorative associations: in the twinned formal and narratological processes of establishing the *mise-en-scène* and building suspense, these denotative and perspectival maneuvers diffuse the immediacy of the camera-spectator-weapon constellation, and ultimately make it clear that the point of view afforded here is *of* the killer, situating the murderous gaze within a localized agent, allowing the assassin/surveillor to himself be surveilled, and from this dissociating the complicity between spectator and murderer, seeing and killing. Counteracting the risk of revealing too much, the directness of the gun-murderer-camera-vision-observer concatenation is necessarily disengaged and delimited, becoming a narratologically instrumental means of localizing the particular and peculiar vision of the criminal, and is thereafter reserved for the parallel track of the Scorpio Killer's (Andrew Robinson) machinations vis-à-vis Harry Callahan's (Clint Eastwood) investigation: in other words, one discrete perspective among many, relatively abject but localized and contained in apposition to a preferred site of identification in Callahan. The difference between the Scorpio Killer's technological gaze and Callahan's is critical here: whereas the former's vision is identified with the limited monocular gaze of the gun-scope-as-gun, the latter's is quite literally binocular, multifocal, broad and balanced; the eyes of a man with whom the spectator has already identified, not (like *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s HAL) the cold and calculating eye of a machine.

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[78] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 83.

A logistically similar shot from Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998) takes this associative principle further, and in its concerted unpleasure reveals the necessity for the above machinations. In a scene depicting the surprise razing of a Japanese military encampment in the jungles of Guadalcanal, the camera fully takes the position of the instrument (an M-16 assault rifle in the hands of an American infantryman) by means of direct point of view, as it bears down upon its stumbling, fleeing, pleading victim. While the instrument for which the camera is "substituted" is unseen and, unlike *Dirty Harry*, there is no "scope-frame" to discretely mark the weapon's point of view as such, it is nonetheless and before the fact unmistakable: the camera qua camera is the weapon here, dreaded and lethal, and the eye which identifies with it is as complicit in and conscripted to the violence of the scene as the grunt behind the rifle, bound by duty. In much the same way as the eye both behind and before the camera finally becomes the camera, taking on its objectivizing leer and distanced witnessing of events, in this brief but remarkable shot the camera becomes the weapon it always was anyway. The spectatorial eye surrendering to the camera's gaze conflates with the rifle's cold and lethal intent, with the gun-camera, now fully one, enacting a mechanized and distanced violence that is inescapable and ineluctable: the spectator, substituting its gaze with the complex of looks on screen, at the same time the soldier-gun, the photographer-camera, and the victim-subject for whom there is no escape.

This instrumental quality, of course, is not limited to small-form sequences or episodes as moments of canny, if not always intended, self-disclosure. While few (for obvious reasons), some contemporary commercial films not only explicitly exploit these instrumental qualities as a matter of course – say, in genres of suspense and horror – but go so far as to elevate them to a clearly-articulated organizing principle, with the violence of content integral to the plot and generically-codified formal machinations matched by an explicit and consistent revelation of the violences integral to the apparatus. By all accounts, Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) is a film that is steeped in violence of all kinds and degrees, establishing a diegetic world in which crime, murder, cannibalism, torture, and madness are omnipresent threats to the image of bourgeois civility, morality, and sanctity. But in point of fact, not unlike the case of *Psycho* the film is not particularly violent in the empirical or quantitative terms of what is explicitly shown and recognized as "violence": those generically requisite, structurally integral acts of violence that do occur most often take place off-screen, to be later reported in expository dialogue (e.g., Dr. Chilton on the nurse who Lecter had attacked, Sgt. Crawford on Miggs' fate, Ardelia Mapp on the fate of the ambulance crew in Lecter's escape from custody), witnessed in effects (e.g., Benjamin Raspail's embalmed head, the disemboweled and crucified Officer Boyle), or otherwise examined after the fact as a matter of purely forensic interest (e.g., the crime photos of "Buffalo Bill's" victims, the autopsy of Fredrica Bimmel).

In either directly or indirectly presenting "images that upset the mind," the film undoubtedly earns its affective claim as unnerving and unsettling; however, that it is commonly considered among the "most violent" films of its genre, and certainly of contemporary Hollywood cinema, is more difficult to justify by the objective, evidential, and quantificatory criteria most commonly applied. Still, this is by no means an incorrect appraisal if we not only consider the film's violence qualitatively, but also in the degree to which these qualities are hyperextended as operative principles of unease throughout the film: the violence not only in how it captivates and positions the spectator within an always-threatening diegetic space, but more than anything in how it explicitly and consistently connects vision – the camera's, the characters', and the spectators' – with violence as its organizing trope. Again, while commercial narrative films, as a rule and with good reason, tend to sublimate the spectrum of formal and functional violences they entail and enact, *The Silence of the Lambs* foregrounds them to the degree that such effacements and their mollifying effects almost categorically dissolve, yet paradoxically enough (by Silverman's terms) indeed operates as affectively effectively as it does precisely *because* of its marked engagement with each and all of the violences integral to the apparatus and, just as importantly, the degree to which it implicates the spectator as an active and complicit co-conspirator in them.

In strictly generic terms, as a postclassical "horror/suspense" film, *The Silence of the Lambs* is indeed quite conventional, in that the totality of the space it creates is one in which violence may erupt in any space, at any moment: true to both the pronounced ocularcentrism and hypercathectic logic of deferral proper to the genre (and, indeed, to the spectral Cold War logos where both of these conditions are firmly center stage), it is a world in which violence is *everywhere* and *inevitable*, always lurking in the simultaneously threatening and promising out of field, the spectator always on vigilant alert. This generic frame is so potent, in fact, that even the film's opening sequence – where the camera tracks Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) as she runs breathlessly through the woods (in what is ultimately revealed to be an FBI training course outside of Quantico) – immediately evokes and establishes a fundamental instability of diegetic space that is as reliant on the audience's active anxiety and intertextually conditioned horizon of expectations (whereby woman plus woods plus running equates with impending victimization) as on the formal devices employed (the close framing on Clarice, occupying center frame and enveloped on all sides by the surrounding woods, camera and milieu together comprising a claustrophobic cocoon that in turn envelops spectatorial space). From these first, mutually-reinforcing frames, the film as much establishes itself as an unsafe, uncontained and permeable space as it establishes its spectator's rapt and uneasy attention: masochistically anticipating the violence implicitly promised, anxiously dreading and desiring to see "what happens next," while also sadistically authorizing the expected violence to arrive.

Given what Arendt leads us to understand about the contemporary quality and suffusion of violence in its virtualization (the continuously-deferred threat and consequent anxiety of its actualization), and what Silverman notes of the violence of cinematic suture at the simple level of being dragged by the shorthairs of desire through the progression of any narrative, the film's most basic generic model and codes of narrative unfolding can be certainly be considered not only as violent in and of themselves, but as celebrations and exploitations of that violence which feed back upon the generalized economy of violence and its perpetual deferral that organizes spectacular society as a whole. While we might generalize that *any* film in which we anxiously await the unfolding of events – violent or not – entails a certain violence, and one that the subject eagerly, willingly surrenders to and accepts "at any price," here, the terms of the exchange are fully on the table, so to speak: the violence entailed in it the object, and to a degree that any and all pleasure derived from it must also be explicitly recognized as entailing a certain complicity.

From this baseline, *The Silence of the Lambs* is most notable for the ways in which it foregrounds *how* it positions the viewer in specific points of view and mobilizes the notion of vision itself as a means of doing violence. In this regard, the ways in which we are often put *directly* in the eyes of Clarice and, less often but no less critically, the other characters with whom she interacts and who address her directly is notable. In addition to the frequent literalization of point of view (a standard enough identificatory device for the genre), more subtle formal continuities contribute to an unnerving continuity of intensely localized perspective. The clearest example is also, by dint of its consistency, the most subtle: across shots and independent of localized direct perspective or point-of-view, whenever the narrative is "with Clarice" the camera is almost always held at her relatively short eyeline, about five feet above the ground; even "outside her sight," the spectator is always "at her level," "in her (cheap) shoes." The ineffable but discernibly unnerving quality of this perspectival unity demonstrates the degree to which discontinuity and multiplicity of perception – the jostling between positions and perspectives intrinsic to the very language of narrative cinema – is both necessary and expected, central to the derealizing and dematerializing force of the apparatus that is its primary operative violence.

In a certain sense, this is also to say that *any* sustained first-person point of view is pathological and abject in this cinema: something that bears on the dissolution of the individual viewer/body in identification with the camera, bringing vision back to *a* body, and transferentially to that of the now-reindividuated and reembodied spectator. In its relentless insistence on the subjective first-person point of view, the film fully belies its objective reliance *on* the spectator to identify with the camera, the tenuous quality of its insistence on not only "the primacy of its own point of view," but on the very reliance on the realization of a localizable and recognizable point of view that is impossible without the acknowledgement *of* the spectatorial body for representation to occur at all: as Stephen Heath remarks,

> (t)he spectator must *see*, and this structuring vision is the condition of the possibility of the disposition of the images via the relay of character look and viewpoint which pulls together vision and narrative. Emphasis was laid earlier on the structures of the structuring vision that found cinema; what is emphasized now is the dependence of our very notion of point of view on those structures; dependence at once insofar as the whole Quattrocento system is built on the establishment of point of view, the central position of the eye, and insofar as the mode of representation thus defined brings with it fixity and movement in a systematic complicity of interaction – brings with it, that is, the 'objective' and the 'subjective', the 'third person' and the 'first person', the view and its partial points, and finds this drama of vision as the resolving action of its narratives.[79]

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[79] Heath, "Narrative Space," 400-401.

Given that Hollywood cinema's abiding insistence on objective transparency most often demands the spectator be positioned in and "made to see" from an objective perspective relative to the events that unfold onscreen (that is, the third-party perspective of the "transcendental eye" or "distanced observer," concertedly *not* directly connected to a literal perspective on-screen, which facilitates the "safe and objective enjoyment" of even the most horrific scenarios as it schizophrenically reinscribes the spectator as both present to and absent from the screen-reality), this simultaneous foregrounding and rupture of the identificatory process is significant in creating not only an intensely subjective-experiential image and experience of these events that moves beyond the "impostured immediacy" of, say, the combatant's point of view noted earlier, but one that is *consistently but inarticulably unpleasurable*: not simply "following" Clarice's journey but, through consistent use of direct perspective in intersubjective encounters up to and including scenes of dialogue, "fully becoming" Clarice in the same way that (if only for a moment) the spectator in Malick's film fully becomes the soldier-camera-gun, immersing and implicating the viewing subject all the more into the diegesis, interpellatively enveloping her position of both being and feeling threatened by the violence, commands, judgments and "subjugating gazes" that come at her from all sides, collapsing both the safe psychic *and* ethical distance between subject and object, spectator and screen.[80]

Perhaps unsurprisingly in this film's go-for-broke spectatorial game, the essentially patriarchal character of suture is what is most evidently pronounced throughout the film's formal and narratological elements, using it as a lever against the pleasures it supposedly guarantees for the presumed-to-be-patriarchally-identified spectator. As Silverman observes,

> (o)ne of the chief mechanisms by which the system of suture conceals the apparatuses of enunciation is by setting up a relay of glances between the male characters within the fiction and the male viewers in the theater audience, a relay

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[80] In "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," Jameson notes that this problematization of subject-object dualism – which, following Heath, we can understand as facilitated by the cinema's structuring of vision and subjectivity – has terrible consequences for the subject qua subject: "Subjectivity is an objective matter, and it is enough to change the scenery and the setting, refurnish the rooms, or destroy them in an aerial bombardment for a new subject, a new identity, miraculously to reappear on the ruins of the old." (*The Cultural Turn*, 52) While he is wary of positing the existence of a unified or centered subject in any historical or discursive context, in the cinema's relentless shifts in perspective and identification, Jameson sees a replacement of the category of the subject (return of repressed) with a "multiplicity of simulacra" – the result being that, for the subject constituted within its terms, "it is the cinema that is the truly centered subject, perhaps the only one: the Deleuzian schizo being only a confused and contradictory idea alongside this apparatus that absorbs the former subject-object pole triumphantly into itself." (53)

> which has the female body as its object. Similarly, one of the most effective strategies at its disposal for deflecting attention away from the passivity and lack of the viewing subject's own position is by displacing those values onto a female character within the fiction. (Needless to say, this displacement assuages the anxieties of the male viewer; it heightens those of the female viewer.) Often the entire narrative is organized around a demonstration and an interrogation of the female character's castrated condition, a demonstration and an interrogation which have as their ultimate aim the recovery of a sense of potency and wholeness for both the male character and the male viewer. This narrative organization reflects the paradigm which suture establishes at the level of the shot; in both cases an absence is first revealed, and then covered over through a skillful displacement from the level of enunciation onto that of the fiction.[81]

Certainly, the determining violence of the patriarchal gaze is most apparent here, not only as a purely narrative device (Clarice as subject to the wills and whims of every man with whom she comes in contact), but also as a formal one: the shot-reverse patterns of conversations revealed as cinematically procedural exercises in being-articulated as subject, as being-subject to the determining scrutiny (and desires) of the Other. In the foregrounding of the primary identification with Clarice, the conversation sequences (as *dialogues*) reveal, but do not necessarily fully disrupt, the cinema's triadic structure of looking described by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," where she argues that

> (t)here are three different looks associated with the cinema: that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. Without these two absences (the material existence of the recording process, the critical reading of the spectator), fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness, and truth.[82]

While Mulvey argues that to achieve the end of dismantling this "monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions ... is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment"[83] – in other words, to assert and reinscribe the distance between spectator and image by objectively foregrounding the presence of the apparatus, its devices, its manipulations – certainly a similar end can be understood here in the excess of identification, the excess of subjective vision. In subjugating the "third look" to the now-conflated "first" and "second," the gazes of the camera and the audience become directly implicated and explicitly complicit in the scenario: in abasements, in shaming, in judgment, or in predation, the active and interested cruelty cannot be ignored or denied, and is understood, experienced as such. Moreover, it is in this process that the primarily patriarchal identificatory loop is at least partially short-circuited: the full immersion in the abject-feminine subject position *distinctly unpleasurable by default*, here revealed in both its full determination and the means of that determination, but nonetheless necessarily accepted as a condition of having place and meaning within the symbolic field.[84]

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[81] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 222.

[82] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 208-209.

[83] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 209.

But the film goes even farther than this to both reveal and exploit the instrumental violence of the apparatus, directly connecting vision and technologies of visualization with sadistic psychopathology and its violent intents and ends. The centrality of optical devices to James Gumb's (Ted Levine) crimes and characterization is critical: his use of night-vision goggles in stalking his prey and of video cameras to document his fantasized transformation-in-progress (when he dons makeup, a lace shawl, and a wig made from the scalp of a victim, he presents himself to the lens of the camera as woman, as display) are textually inextricable from the implicit connections between vision and determination in the film's economy of gazes. In the scene that first introduces Gumb visually as he surveys and stalks Catherine

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[84] The identity of the spectator-consumer with the determined-feminine subject position carries an important implication for the patriarchal qualities of the apparatus vis-à-vis its spoken spectatorial subject. Supplementing these accounts, Mary Anne Doane suggests in "The Economy of Desire" that the gendered spectatorial codes at stake in narrative cinema are not at all masculinized in the first place, but rather categorically feminine and feminized; this, for her, is what facilitates woman's consumption of the image of woman and consequently better situates "the ways in which the woman is encouraged to actively participate in her own oppression" because it does not require "the erasure of female subjectivity by the commodification of the female body." (120) Beyond the principle of castration-as-emasculation (which doesn't quite get to the feminine, only the feminization of the masculine from a presumed-to-be patriarchially identified baseline), Doane argues that the image of the woman-as-consumer is what organizes spectatorship in its essential passivity, determination, and muted recalcitrance, and that "it is only insofar as consumerism is associated with a particularly maligned form of subjectivity or agency that the woman's role in such an exchange is assured." (120) In other words, by this fundamental presupposition sutured spectatorship is as much about instilling lack through a withdrawal or denial of phallocentric power as it entails exploiting the always-already feminized passivity of the conditioned consumer that marks the totality of the spectatorial experience (regardless of the gendered identification of the individual viewer). Doane's inversion here is certainly born out in *The Silence of the Lambs*' cruelly sympathetic embrace of the trope of woman-and-identified-spectator-as-determined, where the final implication of that inversion is significant: rather than the abandonment of female subjectivity to the full determination of the patriarchal gaze, a full habitation of that subjectivity that demands the perhaps impossible abandonment of male subjectivity (and at least demands a shameful recognition of its sadistic and determining character). The violence of castration highlighted by the likes of Silverman and Mulvey, then, is equaled and redoubled by the violence of exploitation and subjugation; the spectator-consumer, by this account feminized as the precondition of being consumer, is in this film put in the position to recognize the act of viewing as one which entails disempowerment and enunciation on perhaps a more immediate level (that is, the universalized level of consumption as a marker of the late-capitalist subject).

Martin (Brooke Smith), a simple three-shot sequence synechdochally cements the pathology of the previously-unseen (but much-discussed) character with mechanical optics: the barrels of the goggles briefly illuminated by headlights, the perspective of the victim through the sickly phosphorescence of the lenses/Gumb, and a return to a direct-view of the goggles as they lower to reveal the human eyes framed beneath, looking directly into camera.

The not-incommensurate *jouissances* of temporarily adopting and inhabiting this simultaneously voyeuristic and interestedly sadistic gaze notwithstanding (as itself another longstanding, general, generic requirement of the horror/suspense film), this simple shot progression literalizes what is relatively implicit in the entire film, and integral to the cinematic encounter in general: there is a complicity between the absent(ed) apparatus and the violence it records and presents, between the viewer and the images consumed and anticipated, *but not fully between the apparatus and the viewer*, the latter of which must needs accept what the former places before it. But still, in the space and sight these sequences inaugurate and inhabit, and in ways that go beyond even Scorsese's perceptual conflations, Bill is not only *a* camera: *he is the camera*, and so too the viewing subject, their murderous impulses and singular vision one and the same. And in introducing this connection, all vision, all the looks operative within this (and indeed any) text, are likewise implicated in the violence integral to the cinematic apparatus, text, and viewing encounter.

The depth of this "specular seduction," to use Julia Kristeva's term, is all the more apparent in the reiteration of the night-vision device in the film's final confrontation between Clarice and Bill, her blindness framed by counterposed with his ability to see, as he reaches out, toys with her, and finally moves in for the kill. Interestingly enough, it is not masculinely-coded vision but femininely-coded sound, amplified in the absence of Clarice's own power of determining vision (a power, the film has repeatedly established, that she lacks), that gives him away, and the light first from their muzzle flashes as they fire at each other/the camera and finally streaming through a broken window – the light of day, of truth, of justice enacted and done, of Clarice's power claimed and rightfully asserted – reveals his destruction and undoes his threat: when they finally share a proximity in an unmediated space,[85] only the dead husk behind the mechanism remains, and a clear victor – Clarice, the spectator – emerges. Because it is so often the case that in contemporary cinema that the instrument of violence is made one with (and often supercedes) its wielder, at once collapsing and reinscribing the distance between act and actor, very much the same can be said of the camera as such an instrument, in ways particularly clear here in the moment of its apparent destruction and defeat: after this point, as the film enters its resolving *denouement*, the camera holds a more traditionally transparent, "third-person" perspective. And while it would be tempting to regard Clarice's defeat of Gumb's predatory, monocular gaze as some kind of triumph, an expression of Mulvey's political project of (the image of) woman destroying the (determining gaze of the) Other, this moment is in fact the film's most conservative and affirmational gesture, insofar as it subsequently liberates the camera (and the audience) from its theretofore insistent culpabilities and victimizations, relegates the pathology of its gaze to the abject (and indeterminately-gendered) villain, and returns Clarice, as image, to the symbolic regime and means of traditional cinematic discourse in the film's *coup de force.*[86]

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[85] Nearly every intersubjective space between Clarice and others that entails some kind of violence is in some way mediated and distanced in the film: beyond the intervention of Bill's camera-vision, conversations with

And in the film's conclusion, a tellingly aporetic conundrum. On the one hand, what is central to the film's unpleasure is precisely the degree to which it foregrounds and displays how vision and sexual difference congeal and structure the very language of contemporary cinema: by this foregrounding, and by setting the viewing subject as not only a viewed subject (the mode of both direct perspective and direct address used throughout the film) but as a female subject (which entails not simply being viewed and judged and the self-disciplinary and performative comportations in light of that fact – these are characteristic of any subject, really – but also being desired and vulnerable to violence, and certainly unable to fend off the violence of the desiring gaze), an abject subject-position, the viewed as viewing, and the viewing being viewed. On the other hand, at the same time that the narrative reveals

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threatening Others always occur across a desk, over evidence, over the telephone, across an expanse of room, on either side of cell bars, walls, or doors, or between guns. The transparency of Lecter's cell wall in the first act, in fact, constitutes a useful metaphor for the subject of cinema: invisible but always there, even if forgotten, as an unbreakable shield from the material violence on its other side (but only that). This distance is meaningfully collapsed in only three moments: the vanquishing of Bill described above, the handshake shared between Clarice and Crawford (Scott Glenn) after her graduation from the academy, and, in what may be the film's most tactile and chilling moment, in the brush of fingertips with Lecter that closes their last face-to-face encounter.

[86] A handful of recent independent "faux-documentary" films, most notably the Belgian cult hit *Man Bites Dog* (1992) and the surprise worldwide blockbuster *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) conclude with the death of the camera itself: a striking gesture that speaks to an aggressivity toward the camera and its multiple determinations that bears further theorization.

the force and omnipresence of patriarchal determination and the procedural interrogation and display of the gendered subordination, it also ultimately supports it, falling lockstep into the fantasy of eternal female/spectatorial disempowerment in the final scene: Clarice, reduced from her actualized and recognized empowerment (killing Gumb and being welcomed into the ranks of the FBI as a badged agent and equal among male peers in patriarchal authority) to the terror of impotence as she futilely calls out for Lecter, the final image of our ostensible protagonist is one of helplessness, isolated and small in the frame, pleading one last time to the camera; Lecter, refusing to return either her call or her gaze (his eyes behind sunglasses, his face turned to right of frame), quite literally "leaving her hanging" on the line as he strolls out to continue his life in freedom, disappearing into a crowd, his potency returned, her subordination reinscribed, and thus the film ends with the spectator cruelly caught between these two loci of identification, also abandoned and "left hanging" as much with the lack of plot resolution (coupled with the promise of further events to come) as with an overarching sensation, clear and terrible, concertedly unresolved, of the intractable paradoxes and soul-sacrificing compacts of sutured spectatorship integral to any narrative film.

If the cinema, by dint of its multiple integral violences, can be placed among the inventory of instruments of violence, in closing this section we might also recognize that this instrumental quality both conceptually resonates and materially intersects with structures of violence "in the larger world," opening on and informing fields "outside" the more insular parameters of screen and subject we have thus far occupied. As a point of entry, Deleuze's reading of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is instructive for understanding the ways in which the cinema mirrors, extends, and enables the hegemonic operations of power, inasmuch as power, today, is "properly cinematic" in its diagrammatic organization of fields conducive to its means and ends. In detailing Foucault's concept of panopticism, Deleuze isolates the three critical procedures:

> *(D)istribution in space* (which took concrete form in enclosing, controlling, arranging, placing in series…), *ordering in time* (subdividing time, programming an action, decomposing a gesture…), [and] *composition in space-time* (the various ways of

> 'constituting a productive force whose effect had to be superior to the sum of elementary forces that composed it') … [87]

Transposing and extending these terms, we might say in the most generalized sense that in much the same way as the panopticon becomes for Foucault in the late eighteenth century a dispersed modality of power over knowledge and behavior both locally (in and on the individual body) and diagrammatically (as an overarching force of organization greater than any localized particular use or deployment of force), very much the same might be said of "the cinema," itself disengaged from the materiality and ends specific to the apparatus in becoming a pure organizing function (i.e., *the spectacle*).

Of particular interest here (and especially so if we recall Kracauer's expressly materialist yet far more idealistic notion of "camera-reality") is the intrinsic, functional tendency of power to both organize and derealize the fields in which it operates, to arrange and rearrange their terms to its own will and functional necessities, to constitute, extend, and apply diagrammatic functions in accord with its own specific modalities which prepare and precondition those fields for hegemonic self-sustenance. These tendencies and operations are not only analogically "like the cinema" in their modes and means of parsing, analyzing, instrumentalizing, and reconditioning the very conditions of material and conceptual reality into a consistent and coherent system, nor are they necessarily (in a perverse twist on Bazin's idealist ontology, retaining its terms but rethinking its points of origin and intent) "protocinematic," actualized in a medium antecedent to its impulses, but rather are, at the very least today, "properly cinematic": the modes and nature of power mirroring and extending the properties of the medium as much as the reverse.

As Virilio notes in *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, the effects of this conceptual and material compact are deep and devastating:

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[87] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 71. Brackets mine. Deleuze's point of reference here is *Discipline and Punish*, 163. In "purely disciplinary" terms, the principle of panoptic power has a clear parallel in cinematic spectatorship: not only in the sense of the transcendental observing eye to which one simultaneously submits and identifies, but also (in a way which evokes more strongly Adorno and Horkheimer than Deleuze, or even Foucault, in principles of determination) insofar as "it is the pure function of imposing a particular taste or conduct on a multiplicity of individuals, provided simply that this multiplicity is small in number and the space limited and confined." (Deleuze, *Foucault*, 72) From this, if only by way of analogy, we can see basic correlations to theatrical conditions: the audience controlled in size, confined to the auditorium, comporting themselves accordingly vis-à-vis the social codes of theatergoing and the compacts of spectatorship demanded by the industry and apparatus, and so on. Such analogies, of course, have their limits: the cinema is no more "purely disciplinary" (though it certainly has such a role in that function) than it is "purely ideological" (though it certainly has a role in that function as well).

> Cinematic derealization … affected the very nature of power, which established itself in a technological Beyond with the space-time not of ordinary mortals but of a single war machine. In this realm sequential perception, like optical phenomena resulting from retinal persistence, is both origin and end of the apprehension of reality, since the seeing of movement is but a statistical process connected with the nature of the segmentation of images and the speed of observation characteristic of humans.[88]

Indeed, Virilio argues that the (techno)logical properties of the cinematic apparatus have long informed the exercise of power in the thought, language, justifications, and material-operational mechanics of warfare itself (that is, the visible articulation of both the violence of power and the power of violence in a strategic demonstration of pure means), the medium's role in these processes being more than incidental, supplemental, or accidental, but absolutely integral. On the one hand, Virilio describes this role in its absolutely literal sense, with the motion picture camera as part of the material technologies of modern warfare, the camera today as a necessary instrument: as a precondition for the conceptualization of the field of war, in the Clausewitzian propagation of war "by other means" by way of harnessing an image of that field for the home front and the enemy alike (i.e., the cinema as political weapon in the battle for "hearts and minds" – a practice whose terminology was coined in light of Vietnam, but whose operations are present from the very first newsreels[89]), and most devastatingly in the enactment and strategic waging of war through the integration and implementation of cinematic technologies and techniques, from aerial surveillance and reconnaissance of the field to image-targeting systems which frame establishing shots, close-ups, and the arrangement of elements in the targeted *mise-en-scène*, to finally, in the post-Vietnam era, missile-mounted cameras which unite image and artillery in ways that are anything but "mere analogy." The conceptual and practical impact of the cinema on the means and ends of contemporary warfare once the former's technologies are integrated into the latter is considerable: the camera's vision of war supplants and fully becomes its actuality, staging scenes and scenarios for tactical and strategic movements over and through distanced and derealized fields of contest. No longer a matter of war *and* cinema, war *is* cinema, their logics and practices commensurate and intertwined:

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[88] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 79.

[89] The cinema found itself very early in the service of the state as a necessary apparatus in the waging of war, particularly in the case of the newsreels that were as much an addition to cinematic exhibitions as a prime attraction. The use of the newsreel was not simply for providing information and garnering support on the homefront: it also provided a means by which that of the enemy might appraise the course of the war. Such a propagandistic logic, and particularly with its eye toward presenting an image to and for the outside, of course, was the driving force behind even Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*: a text designed as much for local propaganda as to present an image to what would become the Allied front of the strength of the post-Weimar German Republic, the Reich in numbers, organization, unity of purpose and vigor a force to be reckoned with (this image, of course, being staged and incomplete, but as such symptomatic of Arendt's and Agamben's theses of power not only *on* display, but *as* display in a Benjaminian aestheticization of politics).

> From the first missiles of World War Two to the lightning flash of Hiroshima, the *theatre weapon* has replaced the *theater of operations.* Indeed the military term 'theatre weapon', though itself outmoded, underlines the fact that *the history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception.* In other words, war consists not so much in scoring territorial, economic, or other material victories as in appropriating the 'immateriality' of perceptual fields. As belligerents set out to invade those fields in their totality, it became apparent that the true war film did not necessarily have to depict war or any actual battle. For once the cinema was able to create surprise (technological, psychological, etc.), it effectively came under the category of weapons.[90]

But Virilio is not content to position cinema as merely a contributive factor to the modern thought and practice of war as a kind of supplementary extension: indeed, in this conceptual affinity and practical interaffectivity, the politics and practices of war equally come to bear on politics and practices of cinematic production: in other words, cinema is war as well. Of the increased reliance on photo- and cinematographic surveillance and intelligence – to say nothing of reportage – during the Vietnam War, Virilio notes that "(p)eople used to die for a coat of arms, an image on a pennant or flag; now they died to improve the sharpness of a film. *War has finally become the third dimension of cinema.*"[91]

Certainly, the modes and means of filmmaking have long and often been observed to be similar to those of waging war, with strategic and tactical decisions made by the filmmaker-as-general on the field of the visual, orchestrating and mobilizing an army and an arsenal against opposing profilmic and political/industrial forces, silencing dissention in the ranks, and as much faced with as perpetually creating a chaos that, to win the battles and the war, must be brought under control. In his consideration of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979)

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[90] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 7-8. Emphases his. It is important to note that Virilio's historical scope here far exceeds that of the postwar era. In a way reminiscent of Bazin's "fateful accident," for Virilio the cinema is the point at which war itself was brought into contact with the entire history of post-Enlightenment Western philosophy and representation. For Virilio, the cinema – and particularly in its relation to warfare – extends the epistemological projects of the Enlightenment and capitalism, bringing together in a kind of purposeful unity the entirety of these traditions' idealities as regards modes of separation/segmentation and perceptivity (spatial, temporal, and social) in ways reminiscent of Foucault's notes on the emergence of panoptic power in *Discipline and Punish* discussed above.

[91] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 85.

– a film that, in both its finished form and in its turbulent production, makes such comparisons more than inviting[92] – Virilio makes it abundantly clear that the tasks of cinematic production, like the production of war (and indeed the production of capital), are moored in reining in the chaos and violence such a production by nature creates and entails, in the minimization of risk, and in the maximization of effect:

> Francis Coppola, a great admirer of Abel Gance, shared his passion for the techniques of military commanders and their way of eliminating random factors. After the seventies' vogue for electronic effects, which allowed a considerable reduction in the 'natural', objective uncertainties of scenery and machinery, Coppola and quite a few others began to use the electronic prerecording of both sound and image to reduce the element of chance.[93]

Virilio is hardly alone in these sentiments. In his own appraisal of *Apocalypse Now*, Jean Baudrillard also likens the cinematic mode and means of production in late capitalism to those of war, and more directly to the transformative geopolitical significance of the specific war in question: to wit, extending Arendt's reversal of Clausewitz, cinema "post-Vietnam" as the continuation of spectacularized global politics by other means. Indeed, in a text that is singularly symptomatic of the singular "excess (and) holocaust of means"[94] which characterizes contemporary American filmmaking, warfare, and the politics of techno-economic mastery, appropriation, and derealization common to both, Baudrillard argues that

> Coppola does nothing but that: test cinema's *power of intervention*, test the impact of a cinema that has become an immeasurable machinery of special effects. In this sense, his film is really the extension of the war through other means, the pinnacle of this

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[92] Beyond the film itself, the history and story of its production has become the stuff of legend, as a cautionary tale of the egoism of the auteur's vision quest, as the death knell of the New Hollywood movement, as the ultimate symbol of Hollywood's reemergent excesses. This history, and the often mythical ways in which it is told and framed against the cultural, industrial, and personal conditions of its time, is best accounted for in George Hickenlooper's candid documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, Eleanor Coppola's *Notes on the Making of Apocalypse Now*, and in more muckraking, sensationalistic detail in Peter Biskind's *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex, Drugs, and Rock n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood.*

[93] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 65. While the consequences of this obsession with eliminating chance are, of course, telling, Virilio continues here to prophesize what by the end of the twentieth century had become the norm: the complete digital manipulability of all cinematic representations, reducing the "human element" to the director and a legion of invisible production-infantrymen, armed with computers, in the production of the ultimate image. Of Coppola's aspirations toward a spectacular "total cinema," he says, "In fact, the emotional *One from the Heart* is more of a war movie than *Apocalypse Now*, and it is quite clear that this new film art in which actors and sets vanish at will is an art of extermination." (65) This is the cinema of George Lucas, of Jean-Pierre Jeunet, of Peter Jackson, of Steven Spielberg, of the Wachowski Brothers, and of their progeny and imitators in the contemporary cinema of effects: a cinema increasingly (and increasingly exclusively) of virtual sets, virtual objects, virtual actors, even virtual cameras – a cinema having more in common with animation than live-action, a cinema of pure representation and command of the reality to be both constructed and re-presented.

[94] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 59

> failed war, and its apotheosis. The war became film, the film becomes war, the two are joined by their common hemorrhage into technology.[95]

And to be sure, such an interventionary force has material and political consequences in every field such a production touches upon. In "Postmodernism or Post-Colonialism Today," Simon During takes these analogies even further into the matrices of material geopolitical reality, implicating the film and the contemporary Hollywood mode of production it emblematizes deep within the exploitative, neocolonialist processes and material practices of global capitalist exchange:

> In fact, not only is war a theatre, but film is war. If we read (as good consumers) Eleanor Coppola's bestselling account of life on location, we realize that these stunningly realistic battle scenes were made possible by Coppola's hiring arms and equipment from the Filipino army. During shooting these were periodically borrowed back by the army to fight real insurgents in the mountains. And the film set itself was under guard because of fears that it would be attacked for its supplies. The film is enabled by acts of neo-imperialist war: it cannot disengage itself from what it represents. The collapse of distinctions here between making films and making war is not primarily a cultural fact or theme, but an outcome of specific material conditions. Its effects remain ideological, however: this particular system induces theories of the loss of distance between the image and the imaged.[96]

The violence of cinematic production and its modes of subjectivation, then, extend far beyond the specificity of "the subject" (and "the film"), beyond the abstracted conceptual realm of analogies to the practice of war, and today enters fully into the logic both of global war and global capitalism, the war *of* global capitalism, *the cinema as war-machine*: in the crusade that was the production of this emblematic film, the Philippine countryside and its peoples used in the simulation of the destruction of Vietnamese villages and landscapes, their political strife extended and exploited, barely remunerated, and then, in the final insult and injury enabled by the same global cinematic market that permitted and demanded this exploitative occupation in the first place, sold back the image of their "Third-World hell".[97]

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[95] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 59.

[96] During, "Postmodernism or Post-Colonialism Today," 453.

[97] This is meant both figuratively and literally: as a territorializing and deterritorializing force, Deleuze says in "Control and Becoming," a "war machine" can be be equally conceived as something that has "nothing to do with war [per se] but to do with a particular way of occupying, taking up, space-time, or inventing new space-times…" (*Negotiations*, 172; brackets mine) The political and philosophical implications here, as well as the integrated character of the logic of axiomatic capture and adaptation, go well beyond the colonizing reterritorialization of a market: as Agamben notes so well, "today … the capitalistic-democratic plan to eliminate the poor not only reproduces inside itself the people of the excluded but also turns all the populations of the Third World into naked life." (*Means Without End*, 35)

On an industrial-systemic level beyond that of those captures and configurations specific to découpage, montage, and the resultant film-texts, beyond even the violence of the apparatus qua apparatus heretofore discussed, *Apocalypse Now* is only the most transparent (and obsessively, even proudly well-documented) index of the violence of the *full* apparatus in its geopolitical, culture-industrial, and (to telegraph a later point of discussion) institutionally sovereign capacities. Whether its target is a given aesthetic innovation or a given nation-as-new-market-frontier, the mode and means of contemporary Hollywood cinematic production, distribution, and exhibition all the more reveal and fulfill its violence in extending its logic of capture, reappropriation, dislocation, and reterritorialization to the global scale, and as such operates as an instrument and extension of the axiomatic and aleatory logic of late capitalism. Another weapon in the geo-spectacular arsenal, Global Hollywood consequently comes into its own as of a piece with the deterritorializing forces of late capitalism, and of the global, integrated spectacle, fulfilling Debord's prophetic claim that

> (m)odern society has already invested the social surface of every continent – even where the material basis is still lacking – by spectacular means. (…) So even if in its local manifestations the spectacle may embody totalitarian varieties of social communication and control, when viewed from the standpoint of the system's global functioning these are seen to be merely different aspects of a *worldwide division of spectacular tasks*.[98]

This is not simply an *image* of war, the representation of a specific or special mode of hallucinatory reality which grounds experience to existence: rather, it is the *enactment* of war in the name of such an image, an image of the image of the hallucinatory fever-dream of Virilio's "total war," of light and informatics mobilized as an arsenal, of experience experienced forever from the outside; it is an epic vision of spectacular power that is at the same time an epic envisionment of the power of the spectacle, *the spectacle's propaganda for itself*. Baudrillard, perhaps, puts it best:

> (I)t is necessary for us to believe in this: the war in Vietnam "in itself" perhaps in fact never happened, it is a dream, a baroque dream of napalm and of the tropics, a psychotropic dream that had the goal neither of a victory nor of a policy at stake, but, rather, the sacrificial, excessive deployment of a power already filming itself as it unfolded, perhaps waiting for nothing but consecration by a superfilm, which completes the mass-spectacle effect of this war. (…) *Apocalypse Now* is a global

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[98] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 37.

> victory. Cinematographic power equal and superior to that of the industrial and military complexes, equal or superior to that of the Pentagon and of governments. One has understood nothing, neither about the war nor about cinema (at least the latter) if one has not grasped this lack of distinction that is no longer either an ideological or a moral one, one of good and evil, but one of the reversibility of both destruction and production, of the immanence of a thing it its very revolution, of the organic metabolism of all the technologies, of the carpet of bombs in the strip of film…[99]

A "violent machine" indeed.

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[99] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 59-60. Final ellipses his.

OBSESSION & EXCEPTION:
COMPENSATION, CONFRONTATION, & THE CONTINGENCIES OF REGULATED EXCESS

> *In cinema, it gives the public something that they can't see on television, because violence is very edited down on television, and that's very important today: if you're selling tickets you've got to give people something that they can't see for free elsewhere.*[100]
>
> Michael Winner
> Director of *Death Wish*

> *(T)he individual's gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere.*[101]
>
> Guy Debord
> *The Society of the Spectacle*

> *Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture.*[102]
>
> Giorgio Agamben
> "Notes on Gesture"

> *Cinema is fascinated by itself as a lost object just as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a referential in perdition.*[103]
>
> Jean Baudrillard
> "The Evil Demon of Images
> and the Precession of Simulacra"

Returning to where we began, all of this does not yet fully explain the overwhelming presence of violent content in contemporary Hollywood cinema, nor does it adequately account for this cinema's evident obsession with violence. Certainly, the medium's relation to violence of all kinds and scales, by the terms of aptitude and integrality just mapped out, deeply inform this obsession, and indeed give rise to it as a matter of necessity. But as we have also just suggested, for all the medium's monologic force, and indeed because of this, we can no more speak of the medium's obsession alone than we can of that of the audience, without which, of course, the cinema and all its functions would be nothing more than that proverbial unheard fallen tree. These two obsessions, then, are twinned and mutually determinate, even if the deck is disproportionately stacked: the obsession of the medium as much belies its profiteering principles as its fundamental narcissism and admiration of its ilk, the latter particularly translated and transmitted to the individual and mass spectatorial body in the structurally interpellative identification with and subjection to the apparatus, and all this within the totality of the cinematic encounter as one simultaneously addressing and extending the pervasive, alienating, and often ineffable experiential losses that are both symptomatic of and immanent to an increasingly spectacularized separation from material relations and, indeed, materiality as a whole.

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[100] From The History Channel's *20th Century with Mike Wallace: Violence in the Media*, 1996.
[101] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 23.
[102] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 56.
[103] Baudrillard, "The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra," 196.

In the most basic economistic terms, at the quantitative-empirical level of "violent content" as a stock commodity and those consumer appetites that to some degree determine it by demand, these two obsessions are neatly, causally complementary: violence (more, the promise of violence) equals revenue, and this dialectical supply-demand relation becomes the sustaining force for the medium's perpetual and perpetuating drives. The industry's obsession, however, is today most often understood not as the base for, but as the demand-side consequence of, the public obsession with violence that "keeps it in business." This latter obsession is a double-edged sword: at the same time the means of nourishment for an industry that has by necessity rendered its visualizable violences as commodities and its Achilles heel. Forever at the crossroads of its most natural affinities (the violence it represents and is driven to reveal) and its integral machinations (the violence of its representations), being able to live neither with nor without the visibility of *its own* violence, the cinema continually confronts itself in a permanent, tenuously-regulated state of crisis: all things being fair and equal in war and cinema, after all, "(o)utright bloodshed and direct slaughter are contrary to the unlimited use of violence, that is to say, its economy."[104]

It would indeed be easy enough, and not at all inappropriate, to regard the prevalence of "violent material" in contemporary cinema through the lens of demand-side economics as a response to consumer needs and desires. While this frame of consideration is, in its own way, both immediately relevant (as it reflects the industry's persistent apologia for its profiteering on such content) and dangerously reductive (any univectorial and unilateral economic model being insufficient to comprehend questions of the dynamism and heterogeneity of systems), the questions that this consideration opens are valuable enough to be pushed to their own logical extensions, on their own logical terms. Namely, inasmuch as demand implies desire, and consumer desire is predicated on maintaining at least a certain level of regularity of its satisfaction, what exactly can be drawn from this claim? Is the

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[104] Virilio, *Negative Horizon*, 40.

"desire for violence" simply the desire for the spectacular in its limited, commodity-friendly sense (infantalized reptile brains attracted and engaged by mere extremities of light and movement), or is it at the same time much more than this, a desire for violence embedded in the very constitution of the subject and – more to the point – of the subjectivity proper to the cinema itself? And if so, does not the demand-side lens, in precisely the same way as in other spheres of consumption, ultimately and absolutely justify both the means and ends of the mode of production, shifting the blame for the "consumer's condition" fully onto the consumer, further extending the operative monology of cinematic enunciation into the ethos of perpetual guilt and infinite debt, and replicating the dangerous logic, essentially, of "blaming the victim" that is the deadly social legacy of free-market entrepreneurial ideology?

At least quantitatively speaking, the first concern is not so difficult to begin to explain, let alone to comprehend: the preponderance of empirical violence and its integrality cinematic narratives of all varieties does indeed bespeak a deeply felt (and, in a sense, richly rewarded) demand on the part of the paying public. But the problematic conditions, functions, and consequences of this demand and its satiation or palliation incompletely posited in the latter questions will be of first and final concern here, particularly as they come to bear on the function of time and money in light of the dangerous "commodity" for which they are exchanged (spectacular violences, of all scales and varieties) and the means by which this commodity is able to be delimited and situated as such in the first place. Through and beyond the market principle, this bivalent obsession with violence, in fact, directly concerns this cinema's very conditions of possibility, and as such cuts to the very heart of the medium's relation to the spectator, to itself, and to the economy of violence that binds them.

To briefly return to the psychosocial and material-physiological fundaments of Kracauer's work, we might reframe the public obsession with violence (and the sensational in general) as much as a function of conscripture to the economy of consumerism as a function of unconsciously but actively maintaining and conserving a psycho-affective economy in the face of the systemically (and in their own way unrelentingly) violent conditions of modern experience. To be sure, neither of these functions are separable, nor are they unique to contemporary cinema or contemporary society in any way: rather, they mark and moderate the conditions of continuity for the cinema's longstanding, even inaugural function in mediating the crises of historical experience. As such, the cinema's evidenced obsession with such phenomena may also be understood as both determining and determined by the course of pervasive, publicly felt anxieties of the imminent and immanent violence of the everyday via what Ben Singer isolates as an historically persistent and socially significant "commerce in sensory shock."[105]

As Singer argues in "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," the historical emergence of the cinema as a simultaneously sensational and sensationalistic medium was a critical piece in a complex of palliative philosophical, discursive, and experiential strategies for addressing and extending the anxieties of the time. Singer situates the function of sensationalism in the context of early twentieth-century urban-industrial modernity, where myriad, rapid and sweeping moral/political, cognitive/philosophical, and socioeconomic/material reconfigurations collectively constituted a generalized experiential/neurological condition of hyperstimulus. From illustrated trade magazines to carnival thrill rides to the cinema, the proliferation of sensationalistic media and entertainments which accompanied and extended the pervasion of this condition leads Singer to argue that the totality of the modern urban space contributed to a widespread existential and psychic neuraesthenia (or "modern nervousness": a formulation borrowed primarily from George Simmel's somatic theories of the physiological manifestations and effects of anxious mental states), and that, at least diagrammatically speaking, we might transpose these functions to our current context (where these conditions and its resulting condition are certainly amplified).[106] From this foundation, Singer attempts to understand what, on the face of things, is a relatively simple and still-applicable question: why, in conditions that were consciously recognized and unconsciously felt as intrinsically and perpetually violent, would sensational media and entertainments in the popular sphere that, in form and content, replicated and redoubled the generalized violence of modern life become so phenomenally popular? What, in other words, can be understood beyond the apparent public obsession with the sensational *as such*: what could be the underlying function of such entertainments in such conditions?

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[105] Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," 88.

[106] Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," 93.

To answer these questions, Singer frames the subject's desire for and encounter with "violent entertainment" within a dialectic of *constitution* and *compensation*. On the one hand, he presents Walter Benjamin's Freudian thesis that the modern subject's encounter with the sensational is demanded by unconscious drives for psychic habituation to the generalized shock of the everyday: a particularly notable formulation given his conception of the cinema as a *non pareil* mechanism for the safe, controlled experience of psychical destabilization and shock. The Benjaminian argument presupposes that the formal shocks offered by the cinema (to say nothing at all of what may be represented on screen) replicate the pervasive discontinuity of the modern experiential landscape, and thus presents itself as a means by which the viewer can acclimate him/herself to that general state of shock by subjecting him/herself to safe and controlled doses of the same. At the same time (and certainly as of a piece with his historical-materialist apologia for leavening his critique of the medium's deleterious symptomatology of a world where the forces of reification and mass consumption threaten even the sacrosanct sphere of art), Benjamin situates the cinema, its shocks, and its express participation in economies of psychosomatic violence as a necessary consequence and expression of its time. As he explains,

> (t)he film is the art form that is in keeping with the increased threat to his life which modern man has to face. Man's need to expose himself to shock effects is his adjustment to the dangers threatening him.[107]

Here, the cinema is ascribed an essentially homeopathic function, whereby the subject – at least ostensibly on his/her own terms and time, and certainly motivated by an unconscious impulse for self-preservation – is able and willing to be sufficiently acclimated or desensitized to the perpetual shocks of industrial and commercial urbanity, and consequently is able and willing to function within the modern environment.

Yet these "dangers" threatening the industrial-modern subject are problematic: given popularity of sensationalistic media with all their grisly visions of a reality organized by "the tyranny of chance in the modern environment,"[108] these dangers are, and certainly are increasingly, a problem of perception and a function of representation, and the "source" of the violence threatening and endured is less localizable in the streets or factory, but instead in the images themselves, as commodities though which such pervasive anxieties were simultaneously inculcated and palliated in this emergent "commerce in sensory shock." So against this theory's air of salubrity and beneficence, we must equally emphasize that this spectacular economy also works to *constitute* a subject adequate to the demands of its environment. In this, we might not only posit a corroboration between this constitution and that actuated by integral violence of the cinematic apparatus, but also a decidedly less idealistic function working in parallel to that described by Benjamin: that the cinema, far from being simply one of many sensational media working in concert upon subjective constitutions at the time, and certainly not exclusively to rationalistically self-preservative ends, instead necessarily holds a singularly privileged and central role amongst these many entertainments, and not exclusively as this modernity's ownmost artform: ultimately supporting not only the burgeoning industrial-capitalist consumer culture, but also the perpetuation *of* those very conditions, intrinsically violent, of disconnection, alienation, and psycho-sensorial overload that undergird the presence of the sensational-spectacular in the first place, and certainly, cumulatively, in such a way as to precondition the totality of the social and discursive field for the continuing development of spectacular society.[109] While not accounted for as such in Singer's discussion, the *proto-spectacular quality* of these processes – whereby the media and its hyperbolized and hyperrealized images constitute a relatively autonomous, disengaged, and imaginary field into which all kinds of anxieties and desires can be channeled, cathected, and mediated, and wherein there is a consequent, widening disconnect between the "real" conditions of experience and those presented in such media and their images – is critical. In ways not so different from what Debord would later name the Society of the Spectacle, and Baudrillard the Order of Simulacra, these images function increasingly at a disconnect from reality, establishing a semi-autonomous sphere of reality that is taken up – and willingly purchased into – as a desperate means of both acclimation and compensation.

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[107] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," from *Illuminations*, 250 n.19; cited in Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," 94.

[108] Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," 84.

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[109] As Singer suggests in his opening remarks, and in ways not unlike Comolli's comments on the emergent "frenzy of the visible" ("Machines of the Visible," 743) already taking hold in the West of the late-nineteenth century, the general conditions of what Debord will later identify as the society of the spectacle have long been in play, and to such a degree that it is tempting to read those conditions – this "social multiplication of images" (743) and the effects thereof – as precursory to the conditions of postmodernity, or worse as an inaugural moment from which an entire century and a half of spectacular culture has unilinearly proceeded. To be certain, the road from "there" to "here" is infinitely more complex than this. However, one note of differentiation might be made here, to retain the character of spectacular society Debord notes: not simply a state of experience and knowledge predicated on a certain and total relation of identity with reproduced image, but moreover the functional identity of those images with the prevailing mode of production. That is to say, the fundamental differentiation that must be made is twofold, coming to bear on the on the grounds of this degree of identity with the mode of production: the former changing in degree, the latter changing in kind.

Singer opens this latter problematic, if only in part, by way of Kracauer, who claims, to a degree contra Benjamin, that the experience of this modern environment is not at all one that demands some kind of anaesthetizing psychic acclimation, but rather one in which experiential and psychological dynamics have already been leveled: these material and discursive conditions have already enacted the most profound deadening of experience, have already done their worst violence to Being. What Kracauer proposes, then, is that the violence of sensationalism functions in a *compensatory* way: as an existential quickening, these shocks and thrills offer a brief sensorial reawakening, an immediacy of reconnection between the perceptual and the physiological, and moreover, by this awakening, *might* reveal something to consciousness of the structure and effects of these oppressive conditions and their blanketing existential white noise.

But only might: these entertainments, and certainly the cinema, are by this function of sensational and spectacular shock *themselves* means of overwhelming consciousness, and take their place within this spectacular economy to function as such. Here – and Kracauer himself recognizes this[110] – this homeopathy must needs fail: in order to keep pace with the increasingly stimulating conditions of experience, to remain on top of and apace with those anxieties, the shocks provided and purchased must necessarily be greater than those already present as the baseline of everyday, with each set of shocks consequently preconditioning the field for not simply the desire, but the need for even greater shocks. In other words, what Kracauer's formulation implies is that the cinema operates within an economy of violence in such a way that perpetually guarantees its *own* necessity to the process, setting its *own* terms for a self-fulfilling prophecy, a perpetual motion machine of the very same expansive logic as that of advertising and commodities. And lest the contemporary comparison be too facilely drawn, this vicious inflationary spiral crucially, qualitatively differs from that at the heart of those vulgar desensitization theories that clutter the popular-political debates on violent media, which are more concerned with the *quantity of the violence one is able to endure* in representation than the *quality of the violence one needs to experience* as an express condition of the forced compact of being subject to those systems of representation that constitute and comprise our mode of existence.

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[110] As Singer notes, "The compensatory thrills of popular amusement reproduced the very register of hyperstimulus that vitiated modern experience to begin with. Alienated labor and urban experience 'demands to be compensated,' Kracauer stated, 'but this need can only be articulated in terms of the same surface sphere which imposed the lack in the first place. … The form of entertainment necessarily corresponds to that of enterprise.' Popular sensationalism both compensated for and mimicked the frenzied, disjointed texture of modern life." (93, citing Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," 93.)

The public obsession with the violent, then, can be generally understood as deeply rooted in a complexly interaffective psychic and material commerce of shock which, as its "price of admission," entails and demands the subject's full investment in and indebtedness to an instrumentally motivated economy of abstracted and semi-autonomously proliferating images: the violence of the world, along with the world entire, reified, enhanced, commoditized and sold back as an image *of* its direct experience. Certainly, this is not necessarily enough to foreclose the embedded potentialities Kracauer has identified: the subject's drives to the sensational, to the violent, indeed to all that cinema offers, are as much a reaction to or against these processes as a product or reflection of them, inculcated semi-autonomously of their constitutional conditions and available means of reconciliation (in other words, a popular counter-politics of desire). Thus the cinema must be situationally and functionally understood as both a means of the reclamation, reestablishment, or redemption of the experience of Kracauerian "physical reality," and also, by these very same means, as an integral, even inaugural mechanism in that experience's dissolution and irrevocable loss.

Giorgio Agamben expresses this bivalent quality in his discussion of what he sees as the cinema's inaugural but problematic role in the virtual reclamation of the meaningful, nonutilitarian gesture. Extending and attenuating the Deleuzian situation of the movement-image as a means of apprehending and mitigating the problematization of the sensori-motor link (simply, the ability to translate ideation into action) in the industrial-capitalist episteme, Agamben argues that the cinema is equally the means by which bourgeois society has recorded its loss of gestures, and that "(a)n age that has lost its gestures is, for this reason, obsessed by them."[111] Simultaneously preserving and obliterating the gesture in its capture as image, cinema, as "the dream of a [lost] gesture," at the same time "leads images back to the homeland of gesture"[112] from which they originated. Framed in Deleuze's more concretely historical terms of transformative events that require such cinematic interventions, if the industrial revolution problematized and the Second World War irrevocably destroyed the sensori-motor nexus binding ideation and action in the Western European sphere, the emergence of full-blown global capitalism and the integrated spectacle – an event that, if different in kind and less localizable and legible, may still be taken as every bit as potent in material terms as a disruptive and reorganizing force – brings these problematics and problematizations to bear on a more intractable and subtly ingrained scale; for today, as Debord laments, "the individual's gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere."[113]

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[111] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 53.

[112] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 56. Brackets mine.

While his account of the politicality of the cinematic gesture is of great importance to the thought of the medium's embedded politicality and potentiality, it should be emphasized that what Agamben's argument entails is the violence *to* gesture and the potential violence *of* gesture, but not, in instrumental terms, violence *as* gesture or, conversely, the gesture as violence. What Agamben isolates in the productivity of gesture – as a means that is not subordinate to any end – is very much akin to what Benjamin describes as a violence that is neither law-preserving nor law-breaking in his "politics of pure noninstrumental means." This consequently positions gesture not only as a mode of thinking politics ("the sphere of pure and endless mediality" where gesture and politics conceptually coincide[114]), but also as a kind of neo-Sorelian counterviolence against the conditions that "did it away." While the dual obsessions with that which appears as lost and its recuperation holds sway regardless of the quality or kind of representation which portends that recuperation, the empirical violence that the cinema makes its staple commodity is not commensurate with Agamben's formulation: while gesture is a kind of violence, violence of the types we have been exploring here – spectacular action and active spectacularity – is not properly of the gestural, and neither are the desires for it.

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[113] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 23.

[114] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 59. As he concludes his "Notes on Gesture," "*(p)olitics is the sphere of pure means, that is, of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings.* (*Means Without End*, 60; emphases his) Interestingly, however, while both gesture and politics are interchangeably and identically defined in his text as "the exhibition of a mediality," gesture is qualified as "the *process* of making a means visible as such," while politics is qualified as "the *act* of making a means visible as such." (57, 116; emphases mine) Given the evident and admirable care to Agamben's use of language in the English translation, this would appear to be a significant distinction (rather than a vagary of the translation process or an oversight on the part of the author), perhaps settling in an uneasy qualification between the virtual/potential and the actual, perhaps coming to bear on the vicissitudes of praxis at the intersection between ideality and actuality, and in any event curiously, cannily telling regarding cinema's problematic status as a properly political force vis-à-vis its problematic but primary and essential relation to both gesture (as a specificity nominally distinct from politics) and the forces of capitalism: that is, as part of a dynamic process, but one in which (and in itself) no decisive action is possible.

Indeed, what is so clearly sought in late-capitalist spectacular society and ironically served by its cinema is less the possibility of a purely nonutilitarian gesture that evades the dominant politics of pure ends, but the opposite: one which promises to have decisive and irrevocable effects in a state of dissolute causation, a determinate and determining act not only within, but against the chaosmos of an ur-relational, parallaxed, shrinking sphere of affairs where everything, in thought and in deed, is seemingly "out of one's hands" and certainly bound within a generalized structure of deferral of ends. Within this frame, extremities of decisive action – in a word, violence as defined by the violent imaginary – are proffered as the only possible expression of agency, and the desperate attempt to reclaim it, by terms that are both implicitly and expressly impermissible, can likewise only be called (and responded to as) violence. And in providing the means to this end the cinema is in an equally desperate and incommensurable position: to fail to live up to its end of the bargain would be to relinquish the throne to the empire, economy, and cultural condition it inaugurated.

The cinema's obsession with empirical violence is thus both a reflection of the obsessions and recuperative gestures Agamben describes and something quite different in kind. On the one hand, it is undeniable that, particularly in our current context, empirical violence and its experience are all but wholly made separate from the lived reality of the bourgeois late-capitalist subject, and moreover has come to represent the most extreme form of experience denied in our mode of existence. But on the other hand, this obsession bears equally on the apparatus as a machine which must deny or deflect attention from its own violences: a characteristic externalization and displacement which, for lack of more nuanced terms, productively distracts and displaces that attention away from itself and its conditions of operation. Moreover, it entails the schizoid impulse embedded in the cinema itself to simultaneously attend and deny its conditions of possibility: the cinema evidencing its *own* self-preservative impulse between the dual demands of fulfilling its "proper functions" and its equal service to industrial-ideological demands that, in requiring that violence be framed and mobilized in specific ways and by specific means, tendentially thwart its revelatory or political drives.

Thus, as much as the Deleuzian maxim – that the cinema serves as a point of meditative mediation on the problematization of the sensori-motor link, and indeed for the general alienation of thought from experience, action, and (inter-)affectivity – might still today ring true, and as much as the Kracauerian sentiment – that the cinema has long served as a point of establishment for the understanding, and even experience, of physical and phenomenological reality and material relations – may also, we must also understand these as fundamentally problematized by the Debordian dictum – that under the conditions of spectacular society, all that was once directly experienced is now in the register and regime of image – nascent in the terms and machinations of this exchange. And in this, the cinema must not only be understood as of a critical piece with the existential and epistemological violence of spectacularized relations, but also, perhaps, as its operative *model*: as Jonathan L. Beller suggests,

> (p)ositing cinema as the process and the sign for the dominant mode of production argues that cinematic relations are an extension of capitalist relations – the development of culture as a sphere of the production line. Thus cinema is at once a sign for itself as a phenomenon and its process, as well as a sign for capital as a phenomenon and its processes. Cinema ... here marks a phase in the development of capitalism and capital's utter modification (metamorphosis) of all things social, perceptual, material. To grasp this idea, the very term "cinema" must be cut loose from the archive of films and network of institutions that are so well documented in order to signify the emergence of a new cultural logic – a coordination of spectacular production.[115]

Beller's assured formulation all the more compels us to return to the means by which these problematic reclamations or redemptions are permitted to take place: the exchange of time and money for that experience (indeed, if we follow the Debordian dictum to its letter, for experience in general) as commodity. For as Deleuze observes in *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, time and money are this cinema's essential conditions of possibility and the limit of its operational capacities, both haunting the medium and compelling its attention:

> The cinema as art itself lives in a direct relation with a permanent plot [*complot*], an international conspiracy which conditions it from within, as the most intimate and most indispensable enemy. This conspiracy is that of money; what defines industrial art is not mechanical reproduction but the internalized relation with money. The

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[115] Beller, "Capital/Cinema," 78.

> only rejoinder to the harsh law of cinema – a minute of image which costs a day of collective work is Fellini's: "When there is no more money left, the film will be finished." (…) This is the old curse which undermines the cinema: time is money. If it is true that movement maintains a set of exchanges or an equivalence, a symmetry as an invariant, time is by nature the conspiracy of unequal exchange or the impossibility of equivalence. It is in this sense that it is money: in Marx's two formulations, C-M-C is that of equivalence [and coordinate with the various modalities of the movement-image, particularly the "action image" which nominally reconciles the problematization of the sensori-motor link], but M-C-M is that of impossible equivalence or tricked, dissymmetrical exchange [and coordinate with the modalities of the time-image, a reflection on the irreparable shattering of the sensori-motor link that in its own way reveals the incommensurability the image's recuperative capacities, a kind of image generally eschewed by commercial cinema].[116]

Holding more detailed discussions of Deleuze's deployment of formal Marxist categories for the following chapters, we might instead make some peremptory remarks about this brief but remarkable passage. Not least given the staggering (and staggeringly integrated) economics of contemporary corporate-commercial filmmaking, Deleuze is still fundamentally correct in locating the medium's obsession with its most readily recognizable enabling and limiting condition of possibility. In this, he also, if indirectly, suggests a primary rationale for the subordination of time to movement or action in Hollywood cinema: quite simply, the commodity form (in whatever form it takes) cannot abide a concerted and direct apprehension of either its conditions of possibility or its limits, lest its magical qualities (and the like quality of all the relations it organizes) be revealed for the laborious, mendacious, and ideologically productive processes they are.

But we might also extend Deleuze's observation here, and claim that the time-money obsession includes that prime commodity trafficked by this cinema – violence – and at the same time informs the logic and conditions of its more transparent inclusions as scenes or moments of phenomenal violence that, by Deleuzian terms, are best grouped under the subcategory of the movement-image he calls "action-images." For Deleuze, cinema's initial role was of establishing a plane of consistency through the industrial age, of mechanically restabilizing the sensori-motor link through images, but in such a way that always operates on and through the axioms of circulation provided by its corresponding modality of capitalism (hence the economic image of equivalence and return in the C-M-C form). The function of the movement-image, for Deleuze, is to valorize, organize, and connect space and motion at the expense of a direct representation of time, which would reveal too directly the asymmetricality in the exchange of spectatorial time/attention/money for the cinematic image (the unequal exchange corresponding to the M-C-M form, the accrual of capital). In this, the category of the movement-image is analogous and amenable to reification as a form of circulating and equivalizing capital, and this tendency is actualized in the clichéd and persistent keystone of American cinema that Deleuze categorizes as the "action-image." In the industrial regime of the movement-image, Richard Dienst explains,

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[116] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 76-78. Brackets marking "*complot*" are translators Hugh Tomlinson's and Robert Galeta's. Subsequent brackets mine.

> solidification and stratification lets cinema regulate the unpredictable worldly connections that it opens; in effect, it becomes possible for cinema to be constituted as one more machine against others, with the movement-image as its staple commodity."[117]

But the categorical subordination of the temporal is problematic vis-à-vis the necessary engagement with temporality *as such* in representations of violence, which would seem to threaten the commodity character of violence that is so crucial here. If the capture of the temporally and experientially im-mediate (i.e., the moment as such) was important to the medium's general aptitude for and affinity with violence, and its equally im-mediate presentation of a piece with the integrality of violence to the apparatus, it also has a place within the categories of the medium's obsessions. As Kracauer and Charney have argued above, the moment and the experience of its instantaneity and immediacy have always been central to the philosophical and affective force of the medium, which perhaps most so in the formal and conceptual correspondence Jameson notes between the moment and violence puts the temporal problematic into sharp relief: the violent moment and the violence of the moment presenting a direct experience of temporality as such, framing perception as an act of concrete and embodied duration, as something physically and psychically endured (as Virilio has suggested, and as a technique of avant-gardists from Buñuel to Brakhage). On the other hand, because the cinema is necessarily obsessed with time and/as money – production time as money invested and spent (the temporal circuit of capital), running time as cost of replication and potential for multiple returns (screenings), screen time (returns again, fitting with patience threshold of viewer as consumer), time and money interchangeable and bound – what evades this spurious *durée* but is nonetheless foundationally embedded in the medium's ontological purview. The im-mediate, the instantaneous, the unforeseen and undeflectable – in other words, by the very terms of the violent imaginary which this cinema precariously engages and extends, the *violent* – is also properly a part of its obsessions, and a potentially dangerous object of desire: something that at once it cannot not reveal, but at the same time something that risks revealing too much of its otherwise-secreted logistics and mechanics, and moreover revealing too much of its complicity in what Agamben, amplifying what is already present in but not explicitly characterized as by Debord, names "the violence of the spectacle," the relentless alienating ephemerality of a discourse constituted in the disunified, indeterminate, and depersonalized procession of moments.

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[117] Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time*, 153.

Certainly, in attending the "violent moment" as such the cinema makes good on its historio-ontological promises, marking and elevating the violence of the moment as such; as Charney puts it in "The Violence of a Perfect Moment," "(t)he violent moment is a hypermoment, a hypostasized moment,"[118] the impulse and effect being "to mime presence, to manufacture a sensation of presence in the face of the impossibility of presence … as if [this moment's and its presentation's] very force could hurtle [it] into the inside of a present moment."[119] But within the context of aleatory, spectacular-sensational discourse, this aesthetic autonomization of the moment certainly works within the tenets of spectacularized consciousness: "(w)hen social significance is attributed only to what is immediate, and to what will be immediate immediately afterwards, always replacing another, identical, immediacy," as Debord says, "it can be seen that the uses of the media guarantee a kind of eternity of noisy insignificance."[120] The revelatory shock of the moment valorized by Benjamin and Kracauer as such is wrested from whatever moorings that would give it the force of sense or legibility, and moreover, as a mode of aesthetic experience (such as that described above by Jameson), coupled with the framing of that experience within the demarcated bounds of the cinema as a phantasmic fairground, is wrested from any direct complicity with the material, temporal, historical, epistemological, or experiential realities that might be revealed in the process.

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[118] Charney, "The Violence of a Perfect Moment," 48.
[119] Charney, "The Violence of a Perfect Moment," 49. Brackets mine.
[120] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 15.

If for the cinema time is always money and, with violence already framed as its central commodity, both time and money are obsessional equivalents with violence, we might also better understand the preponderance of slow-motion, multi-angle, and elliptical editing techniques of the variety inaugurated as "standard practice" by Penn in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and Peckinpah in *The Wild Bunch* (1969) in presenting moments of sudden, violent action. While there is certainly a useful shock value in presenting such events in their instantaneity and immediacy (the startlement of the cinema as Virilio's "weapon of surprise"), there is a greater value, and not simply in the fiduciary algebra, to be gleaned from extending those moments, wringing all the value from them that they might have to offer by spreading their effects over thousands rather than dozens of frames. The time-money/investment-return equation notwithstanding (the cost of, say, a massive explosion demanding an expanded temporal frame to justify the expense of manufacturing the event), it is in such cliché conventions that this cinema of effects most nakedly displays its obsession with all three of its otherwise-occluded conditions of possibility (time, money, and violence, all equivalent and exchangeable as a condition of their inclusion) while at the same time configuring a specific but common set of relations to each which thwart any concerted introspection or interrogations of those conditions as such: subordinating time to movement, money to commoditized relations, violence to objective, empirical form.

Indeed, given the essentially violent quality, form, and effects of capitalist relations and the conceptual and material coordination between those relations and commercial cinema, we might even go so far as to suggest that *cinema's most profound obsession is indeed neither with time nor money but first, foremost, and most desperately with violence*: its mediation, its mitigation, and its imaginary displacements to occlude its functional centrality to its other enabling conditions, most importantly the mode of production for which in Beller's words it is both "process and sign." The very living mechanics of capitalism – based in abiding and axiomatic principles of unequal exchange, appropriation, reification, and the concerted panoply of micro- and macro-political arrangements and formations which enable and sustain the circulation and growth of capital itself – are all predicated on specific yet coordinated and necessarily hidden violences, from those "microscopic incisions of the everyday" which mark our mode of existence to the wholesale economic tyranny of late-capitalist geopolitics. These cuts and rendings are today all but wholly effaced to bourgeois consciousness by the ideology of hyperconsumerism and the faux-transcendence of the commodity as divine gift, and, as we suggested in the above discussion of *Apocalypse Now*, all the more deeply felt in those equally hidden and newly-proletariatized sectors of the global marketplace (who will, to be sure, become sufficiently inured to these conditions as they "develop," spurred by the bad-faith promise of inclusive and equal partnership in global capital). As such, the obsessional treatment of violence in this cinema is a matter of necessity for its own operations, and moreover of a part with the greater logic that its "other" conditions of possibility impart and demand: to efface, to displace, to remove those traces critical for the spurring of consciousness, and to replace them with an imaginary and self-inoculating structure of politically-invested nonmeaning adequate to their void.

The Derridean notion of a "general economy of violence" is certainly no less pronounced when we frame it within the terms of the cinema's conditions of obsession, and even moreso as a matter of *political economy*. As Deleuze, Beller, and Silverman have in their own ways demonstrated so clearly, the politics of exchange found in the cinema are a more or less direct analogon to those of the market: grounded in a debt-debtor relationship, unequal in its operations, and operative only vis-à-vis imaginary complexes which sublimate these inequities into images of desire and just recompense – a concatenation of economies, each relatively autonomous in function, but unified in their means (distancing, displacing, and accommodating machinations) and ends (maintaining the multiple economies at stake in, organized under, and informed by the violent imaginary). The relative autonomy of spheres which permit and legitimize structural violences of all varieties is all the more critical in this regard, as it is what permits each to operate unabated and in concert while substituting alternate, contained spheres that are presented as incommensurable with the logic of the greater social totality, and consequently of a different, and relatively disconnected, microeconomy. The trite distinction between "entertainment" and "reality" is perhaps the most obvious of these justifying separations, but given its force when considering the supposed disconnect between the violence *in* cinema and the violences *of* cinema, is also the most critical to consider.

In closing his essay "The Technology of Homicide," Ken Morrison attempts to theorize such a differentiation between "violence in the real world and violence in the film world," noting that "(i)n the real world violence circulates – it goes around – from offender to victim, and from police to the administration of justice. The social goal is to eradicate violence from circulation, so in this respect, it is reviled in the real world."[121] In the cinematic economy, by contrast, violence enters into an economy of perpetual growth and motility, whereby it is not only valorized in and by the technical mastery of its representation, and indeed is not simply operative as a commodity, but also in circulation and the concomitant accrual of value, fully becomes a form of capital:

> (I)nside the film medium violence participates in the same political economy as money in the real world in that both create value outside the real and outside human relationships. Just as in the abstract world of the market where money creates value outside of itself, so violence creates value for itself once inserted into the film world.[122]

On the one hand, Morrison's claims are of a piece with the nexus of capital, cinema, and violence manifest in the violent imaginary: distanced and distancing spheres of determination, each maintaining an image of separation from the operations of the other. In fact, insofar as a distanced and gratifying relation to violence has itself become a prime and indispensable form of political capital, those cinematic renderings of violence that have come to be integral to this economy are useful markers of not only the larger sphere of violence in late capitalism, but also of the subject therein: supply-side masquerades as demand-side in the love of subjection to the culture industry's violent will.

But on the other hand, Morrison indirectly points to the fundamental fallacies of that imaginary, and indeed of the very separation of these spheres within the indeterminacies of the integrated spectacle. What is most immediately problematic about Morrison's argument here is how it reinscribes the notion that violence is a universally recognized problem for the very concept of civil society, indeed an absolute detriment to its constitution and function. This much is true enough, but to claim, as Morrison does, that the unilateral goal of civilization in the "real world" is the "eradication of violence from circulation" is problematic to say the least. To be sure, the imaginaries of civilization and the bourgeois subject absolutely depend upon the systematic distancing from and expunging of violence from experience and/of the visible, or at least from those fields of visibility that constitute the ideality of these imaginaries. But to say that violence is to be eliminated from circulation altogether is to fatally ignore the violences intrinsic to political economies upon (and against) which the image of "civil society" rests, to say nothing of the structural but concertedly hidden violences upon which the circulation and growth of capital absolutely depends in advanced capitalist cultures which define civilization as such. And because most fundamentally without violence there is no law, no discourse, no economy, and no politics (at least as we know and experience them), the "goal" at stake here is to present the image of the elimination of *certain kinds* of violence through the instantiation of others, and to frame them in service of the same – never its eradication *tout court*. Violence, in whatever sphere of cultural activity and in whatever way it is considered, quite simply *always* has a determinate value, always too much to be wasted.

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[121] Morrison, "The Technology of Homicide," 314. Here, we might recognize the function and effects violent imaginary in full bloom: an exchange of one violence for another, whereby the defensive violence of the state can justly move into an aggressive and forestalling violence, but one only ever equal to the threat posed by the outside that opposes it.

[122] Morrison, "The Technology of Homicide," 314.

Nonetheless, Morrison maintains that "(i)n this strange place where violence takes on value" there is something of a productive capacity alongside its more deleterious ends, inasmuch as "we find a continuity between the modern as the postmodern,"[123] a certain foothold in spectacular society's more aleatory and aqueous discursive landscape: the filmic economy of violence inhabiting a classical function of articulating identity and self-determination while "harkening back" to a more ordered cosmology of value (in other words, a mythic re/turn of the sort innately facilitated by the commercial narrative film). As he explains,

> (i)n the postmodern, there are no grand narratives or totalities, therefore the narratives become incoherent and resolve themselves into difference, otherness, and a simulacrum of their former selves. However, what makes some films coherent in a postmodern world is their modernist circuit of violence in which (like money in the market) it finds a value outside of itself, thus securing an assured path of valorization outside the real."[124]

While limited to a consideration of the legibility of "the postmodern film" and placing an undue emphasis on the actuality of the "postmodern break" as a kind of definitive aesthetic and epistemological rupture, the core of Morrison's claim here can and must be extrapolated, as it usefully suggests that more than any other force it is violence, in its literal and conceptual commoditization, that provides a stable plane of continuity and coherence across historio-epistemological shifts as the common operational denominator to orders of power and knowledge (violence, *both like and as capital*, as the organizing through-line across these dynamic modulations). And insofar as the stability and continuity of violence intimately corresponds to the equivalizing and normalizing circuits of capital, Morrison's argument minimally implies that neither can function (or for that matter properly exist) without similarly coordinated imaginaries: the violent imaginary in tandem and of a piece with an imaginary surrounding the circuit of capital circulation and growth itself, insulated from the unthinkable potential of a crash or loss of value, and moreover the potential short-circuiting of the system entire as this economy and all it informs and subsumes approaches its absolute limit of expansion (the full colonization of nation-economies and social space) in the fruition of global capitalism and the integrated spectacle. But in maintaining these hard distinctions between opposed, even antinomic spheres – "the modern" and "the postmodern," "reality" and "the film world" – Morrison on the one hand undercuts the notion of the tenuous continuity and codependence of violence and capital, and on the other fails to fully recognize that the space created "within the cinema" is always absolutely of a piece with that of the world "outside" of its screen. Here, the screen itself demarcates an absolute point of difference – in the tradition of "aesthetic autonomy" at best, an "escapist" notion at worst – which frames it not as an active interface between real conditions and operations, a semi-permeable membrane through which the real and imaginary transfer and bleed, but rather as an absolutely demarcated and disconnected frame within which an absolutely demarcated and disconnected alternate reality, subject to its own rules and logic, is bound.

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[123] Morrison, "The Technology of Homicide," 314.
[124] Morrison, "The Technology of Homicide," 314.

Still, the discrete economy of violence Morrison isolates within the cinema does point in a more interesting direction (if not one that is as radically or singularly "postmodern" as he wants to claim) that shores up our final problematic to consider: that the cinema enjoys a relative autonomy from the moral/legal codes of the "real world," that it constitutes, functions, and is considered as a *sovereign sphere of exception* that both legitimizes its integral violences and justifies its obsessions. Certainly, what might be called the "general exceptionality" of the cinematic experience (and not just in matters of re/presented violence) is of a necessary piece of the process of narrative engagement, of the exchange for its entertainments, and in its effacements, all of which set the diegetic world apart from an "escaped reality" at the plane of the screen's reflective barrier. Indeed, we may also see such a move to legitimation in Kracauer's ontology: because of the drive to revelation and the visceral reclamation of physical experience that film affords in its effects, Kracauer says that "nothing could be more legitimate than its presentation of spectacles that upset the mind," and indeed the ontology he proposes itself legitimizes whatever presentational and representational violences might be entailed to this (nominally pure) end.

In any event, Hollywood cinema has long since been established – and, indeed, has established itself – as a sphere of exception, operating under an institutional sovereignty in which the rules, moral valences, and political utilities appropriate to violence "in the real world" (as Morrison would have it) are permitted to be provisionally and strategically suspended in three basic but mutually-affirming ways. First, in purely industrial-institutional terms, it maintains its status as a relatively autonomous market force with its own laws and governance and consequently as an economically and politically sovereign space given carte blanche (a dispensation for the industry that carries over to its productions). Second, extending the logic carried with the apparatus' tendential transparency, it evades culpability in denying its own materiality and mechanics: as an *agent* of violence, it "does not exist," and its effects (carried out in realms of subjection which themselves are not considered within the sphere of violence) are intangible. Finally, in accord with its complicity with the violent imaginary and spectacular-sovereign politics of separation and suspension, it constitutes and is considered as an alternative sphere in which the violent or excessive is contained, an ideological-discursive function which also contains and advantageously reframes violence "in reality."

To be sure, the industry has never failed to exploit distinctions between spheres of cultural practice and activity, and in the case of Hollywood this exploitation has become its organizing principle: a persistent apologia and an almost unassailable sovereign alibi. Today an economic entity greater than many nations,[125] Hollywood as an institution and industry has persistently maintained itself as something of a sovereign state in its own right, inoculating itself from public, governmental, or judicial forces through dual appeals to the absolute rights of artistic expression and free trade practices and the institution of idiosyncratic and increasingly opaque self-regulatory practices. Yet this exceptionability as much outside the law as fully within it, coordinate with the prevailing logic of sovereign power: its transparency diminishes in direct proportion to the absoluteness and arbitrariness of its decisions. The trajectory could hardly be clearer: the abandonment of the explicitly proscriptive and permissive Hays Code of "Classical Hollywood" precipitated the formation in 1968 of the MPAA's concertedly opaque ratings code, standards of content, and jurisprudence over matters of content for "Corporate Hollywood," a system of inadmission furtively couched in the disingenuous language of disclosure and transparency, a system more than doubly reliant on the strictures of permissibility and exceptionability than its forebear. True to the logic of the integrated spectacle, in the industry's current self-regulatory system, everything is potentially permissible, but nothing of the process is admitted: the board is anonymous, their decisions made in private, their operative guidelines only available through active membership, their decisions binding, their power over matters ideological and economic unlimited and constituted solely on their own terms. The pivotal murder in Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992) neatly allegorizes the sovereign violence of the industry, as well as the need to cover its tracks: "You saw nothing!" the producer (Tim Robbins) screams as he strangles his victim, and then returns to the rarefied and protected sphere of the studio lot, untouchable, "business as usual."

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[125] In 2004, world box office receipts for Hollywood product was roughly $25 billion; when DVD and video revenues are factored into the equation, the total rises to roughly $44.8 billion. By means of comparison, one hundred twenty of the one hundred eighty nations who are members of the International Monetary Fund enjoyed 2005 gross domestic products less than this amount.

This distinction is also active and actively extended in Corporate Hollywood's product(ion)s, if not as nakedly as by their producers in public discourse. While this distinction is usually exploited by directors as a means of denying whatever kind of culpability or complicity they and their identified works might have with *any* sort of violence or relation thereto "in reality" (Quentin Tarantino currently being the most vocal paragon of these apologist sentiments, having apparently learned quite a bit from his lifelong apprenticeship with the industry in one way or another), on the rarest of occasions it is not only deeply understood, but brought to the screen with a full recognition of its complexity. If Scorsese, in *Taxi Driver*, indeed creates an entire film from within the discrete perceptual reality of a disturbed man – again, Bickle's characterization as a pathological camera, his perceptions a kind of detached "camera-reality" – his treatments of violence "in itself" tend toward the dispassionately objective as a function of Bickle's relation to the world as a reality against which he is counterposed and to which he has no immediate access. The violence he witnesses and, as camera, records and attempts to synthesize, is of the real, and consequently relayed as such; the only stylistic interventions pertinent to scenes of violence (the "god's-eye-view" tracking down the bordello hallway after the final slaughter, the slow-motion rendering of Bickle mimicking shooting himself in the head with dripping, bloodied fingers) come after Bickle's Hollywood-mythic regenerative/redemptive bloodbath, after he takes his place (however anti-iconically) as another avenging angel in the cine-revenge pantheon.

In *Raging Bull*, the commentary on this consciousness of the distinction between "cinematic" and "real" violence is all the more explicit in its consistent and rigorous mobilization of formal devices, which render "violence for display" in very different ways from violences normally hidden, ignored, and unspoken (that is, the "real" violence of the everyday). Within the space of the boxing matches (shot almost exclusively within the space of the ring itself, inside the ropes rather than from an objective-spectatorial outside) the subjective experience is highlighted only in moments of impact, the images subject to an entire catalogue of spatially and temporally manipulative aestheticizing devices: slowed or sped motion, rapid and abrupt shifts from wide or medium shots to extreme close-ups, etc.; the mechanics of the fights themselves – the throwing of the punches, the movement of the contestants as they circle one another, etc. – are presented in real time, but the movement of the action within the ring is redoubled by the movement of the camera, always weaving against the maneuvers of the combatant before it, always an active presence in the scene as such.

Throughout *Raging Bull*, the violence within the ring is hyperaestheticized and hypermediated in such a way that it fulfills that affective and impostured immediacy we might expect as spectators of the "special modes of reality" that accord to the cinematic image of what it is to be subjected to violence. But when regarding and presenting the violence "outside the ring" – particularly in the numerous domestic scenes of Jake LaMotta's (Robert DeNiro) physical and emotional violence against his wife Vickie (Cathy Moriarty) and brother Joey (Joe Pesci) – the camera operates without these devices, simply recording its factuality, and often without even the distancing intervention of a cut. In this distinction, never broken as a formal principle, Scorsese reveals (and, in the process, inevitably reinscribes) that peculiar and specifically bourgeois ethical distinction between violence for and as entertainment (that is, violence as spectacle, framed and presented as a spectacular-affective commodity) and the violence of the everyday (that is, in Morrison's terms, "violence in the 'real' world," factually presented) that can only be maintained within the specific arrangements provided by the violent imaginary. If violence in the former is not only acceptably aestheticized, but indeed offers itself to and demands a certain aestheticization, the violence of latter, by its facticity and when presented by such objective terms, cannot be abided as such.

In any case (and, indeed, as a result of all of these cases, unified under the same logic), contemporary Hollywood cinema and its myriad violences fully operate within, and in so doing extend, the terms of contemporary sovereign power described by Agamben, with the industry, its self-regulatory practices (particularly as manifest in the sovereign body of the MPAA), and the very operational means of commercial cinematic texts themselves as part of this generalized logic: law is suspended (the relative autonomy of "the film world" as a sphere of pure representation), justice is administered on a provisional, case-by-case basis (self-regulatory structures again, with all of their opacity and arbitrariness, and also vis-à-vis the permissibility of specific acts, actors, and actants emerging in specific films by dint of their internal arrangements, valorizations, inclusions and exclusions: each film regarded as a singular set within the larger pantextual set), and bare life is intrinsically politicized and virtualized (that of the spectator and the profilmic body to be sure, but even moreso in the case of the means and ends of this cinema's neocolonialist global expansion in terms of production, distribution, and material subjugation) as an inaugural condition of its power and sovereign right. Given the depth of these coincidences between the classical and contemporary operations of the cinema as an apparatus and an industry and the contemporary politics of sovereignty, we might well modify the Bazinian dictum presented in opening this chapter to say that *the origins of a politics are reflected in the nature of its representative artform.*

As with our cinema, the contemporary politics of sovereignty are grounded as much in the display of their mediality "as such" as they are in maintaining that mediality as a sphere relatively autonomous from material relations. And just as is the case with the operation and execution of power, the cohesion, singularity of character, and operative functionality of the cinematic apparatus cannot tolerate the "disturbing" intrusion of the evidence of *its own* materiality any more than can the subject whose very mode of existence depends upon the invisibility and ineffability of its apparatuses of enunciation, upon imaginaries that are fully embraced as such for the quasi-escapism they proffer. This entire imaginary, like any other, is predicated on its exemption from and absention of material relations, and there is a concordant and consistent through-line of concordance and consistency itself across all levels of operation, from apparatus to text to subject to world-picture.[126] In Baudry's summation,

> (t)hus the cinema assumes the roles played throughout Western history by various artistic formations. The ideology of representation (as a principal axis orienting the notion of aesthetic "creation") and specularization (which organizes the mise-en-scène required to constitute the transcendental function) form a singularly coherent system in the cinema. Everything happens as if, the subject himself being unable – and for a reason – to account for his own situation, it was necessary to substitute secondary organs, grafted on to replace his own defective ones, instruments or ideological formations capable of filling his function as subject. In fact, this substitution is only possible on the condition that the instrumentation itself be hidden or repressed. Thus disturbing cinematic elements – similar, precisely, to those elements indicating the return of the repressed – signify without fail the arrival of the instrument "in flesh and blood," as in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera.* Both spectacular tranquility and the assurance of one's own identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism, that, is of the inscription of the film work."[127]

This tenuous nonrelation to material relations, and even to materiality in general, is both the essential precondition for and what marks the cinema's complicity with the violent imaginary: as is the case with philosophical, political, and economic structures, so neither can the cinema abide the full disclosure of its own entanglements in, complicity with, and indebtedness to violence. Their functional symbiosis should by now be clear: the violent imaginary delimits the field of the violent to the material and phenomenological world, as indices of their improper or unthinkable breakdown (the destruction of bodies and objects, and also of law, order, physics, etc.), while the cinema takes that world and those indices as its objects, derealizing and reordering them in its ideological-narratological operations: in other words, a conspiracy of abstraction actualized through exclusions, exceptions, and accommodations. And to these overlapping spheres of abstraction, we can (indeed, must) add another: the cinema itself, its structural and operational violences which it must also derealize and correct in the images it produces, including its proffered image of itself. In accord with the terms of the violent imaginary, such an operation entails not simply denying its violent character, but putting forth an alternate image of violence which can be recognized in its stead – an ideological procedure for which, Baudry concludes, the cinema is most adept:

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[126] This tenuous consistency, of course, is only that, and subject to any number of violent disruptions – the cataclysmic irrupture of the apparatus' failure or inadequacy in the locking and molecularizing blow-out of the celluloid being perhaps the greatest among these potential disturbances, and perhaps, for the medium at least, the most properly violent "image" it can provide: plunged back into the register of its own materiality, foreclosing its end of the bargain in the exchange, requiring that it acknowledge itself in its failure to do so as a commodity among others, fallible among others, intertwined with the variety of economic exchanges that lead to its consumption, and so forth.

[127] Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," 295-296.

> The cinema can thus appear as a sort of psychic apparatus of substitution, corresponding to the model defined by the dominant ideology. The system of repression (primarily economic) has as its goal the prevention of deviations and of the active exposure of this "model." Analogously one might say that its "unconscious" is not recognized (we speak of the apparatus and not of the content of films, which have used the unconscious in ways we know all too well). To this unconscious would be attached the mode of production of film, the process of the "work" in its multiple determinations, among which must be numbered those depending on instrumentation.[128]

Here, clearly, the stakes are high, and perhaps of the highest order: the violence of the film work – material, psychological, political, and ideological – must be maintained, but kept invisible. In other words, *the consciousness of entire chain of violence must be effaced*, at every point of unequal exchange from production to observation, in every machination and manipulation; the means and motivations hidden, but the ends visibly, "naturally" intact and offered forth with benign neutrality as "mere entertainment."

Consequently, the cinema finds itself compelled – by drive and demand, by forces within and without – to not only render and reinflect *its own* violences invisible and natural to the process (if not to hide, then at least to justify its violent machinations), but to transform and reconfigure and mould the entire field of violence in such a way as to facilitate both its operations and its self-inoculation, *hence displacing the violence "of" the cinema into the apocryphal and invisible, leaving us to consider only the violence "in" the cinema*: the politically invested, affectively coded, and ideologically determined violence proprietary to the late-capitalist violent imaginary, the functions, formations, and limitations of which we will now examine.

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[128] Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," 296.

PART II

CHAPTER THREE
DEFINING & REFINING THE ACT:
FIRST AND LAST(ING) PRINCIPLES OF
CONVENTION, CONTAINMENT,
& CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

CHAPTER FOUR
LUDOVICO IN ACTION:
FROM IMAGES OF VIOLENCE
TO THE VIOLENCE OF IMAGES

CHAPTER FIVE
MILLENNIALISM & MELANCHOLIA,
OR, APOCALYPSE NOW!/?:
A POSTSCRIPT ON THE DEFERRAL OF VIOLENCE
& THE VIOLENCE OF DEFERRAL

FUNCTIONS & FORMATIONS

CHAPTER THREE
DEFINING & REFINING THE ACT: "FIRST AND LAST(ING) PRINCIPLES" OF CONVENTION, CONTAINMENT, & CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

> *Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. (…) In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the* permanent presence *of that justification, for it governs almost all the time spent outside the production process itself.*[1]
>
> Guy Debord
> *The Society of the Spectacle*

> *For it is always the social totality itself that is a question in representation, and never more so than in the present age of a multinational global corporate network.*[2]
>
> Fredric Jameson
> *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*

> *In a world organized like cinema, consciousness becomes a screen on which the affects of production are manifest.*[3]
>
> Jonathan L. Beller
> "Capital/Cinema"

PREFACE:
RESETTING THE STAGE, STAGING THE SCENE

To this point, we have been concerned with situating violence in more or less exclusively conceptual spheres – in the parameters of its thought (and thinkability) in late capitalism and in its operational manifestations specific to the cinematic apparatus. As we have seen, one of the foremost crises brought forth in late capitalism's emergence is in the thought of violence, and particularly as regards its political and ideological utility, with the cinema both bound in and integral to this crisis, positing its own set of unique contributions, problems, and solutions whilst confronting its own crises and conditions of possibility in light of these greater systemic shifts. Within this frame, this cinema finds itself always fighting a war on two fronts: an external (and externalizing) war of containment and reinflection that, part and parcel with the violent imaginary, maintains a certain limited notion of violence which serves to obfuscate the inherent and embedded violence in spectacularized material relations, and at the same time an internal war, a struggle to contain its ontological drives to revelation that could prove the undoing of this entire economy of violence.

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[1] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 13.
[2] Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 4.
[3] Beller, "Capital/Cinema," 91.

But relatively absent to this point is a more trenchant interrogation of the means by which these processes occur, how these means and processes manifest themselves in specific texts, and indeed what these processes are fundamentally in service of. Bearing our previous discussions in mind, we will now shift the focus of the inquiry slightly from those conceptual and constitutional grounds to the functions and formations to which they give rise, either as a matter of course or, more importantly, as matters of prevailing tension in the face of the multiple aporetics upon which "the problem of violence" unfolds. In sum, given the political crises that late capitalism has introduced into the very thought of violence, given the ways in which fundamental transformations in the very nature of exchange, debt, production, consumption, markets, capital, and space give rise to crises in the functions, operations, and thought of social formations, and given the general epistemological breakdowns and dispersals concomitant with these reorganizations (and their own corrective reorganizations in the society of the spectacle), a simple question might be asked: *what is most critical for this cinema, of this time, to attend and restabilize*, in order to maintain the image of violence so central to the continuity of these processes? What, in other words, is the essential point of connection between these multiple, parallel crises, the nexus upon which these crises all come to bear, where violence is always at stake and always poses a singular problem? And what, finally, are the means by which the very notion of violence, in a transforming and volatile geopolitical and global-economic landscape, can be stabilized in ways that not only fit the "contours of the times," but also maintain its enduring mytho-transcendent character which inoculates it from systemic interrogation and the thought of its immanence to the totality of discursive and material relations?

Clearly there is no single (to say nothing of simple) answer here, but it is with these questions in mind, and along the lines that their subsequent demands of displacement and reconfiguration imply, that we can begin to understand this problem as in the first place *formal* and, as this translates into the terms of narrative cinema, *figural* and *spatial*. If violence, in a certain sense, might be considered as an antithesis, destruction of, or resistance to form and formalizations (of bodies, of integrities, of reason, etc.), form itself – its imposition, its necessity – can be posited as a mode of a corrective counterviolence of constraint and containment. The persistence of this cinema's "certain tendencies" (as Ray calls them) is dependent not simply on the preponderance of affirmative clichés and mythic appeals in narrative, but on a deeper, if more basic level: in giving concrete and recognizable form to figures and to spaces, to their relations and to their thought, and thus to congeal and freeze their movement and the consciousness of the same – a question, fundamentally, of *reification*, whereby process is reduced to product, the productive to the produced.

But what this thesis enthymematically excludes in its positing, yet necessarily will come to entail, is another, even more fundamental question: a space for *what* – for *whom*? What I would like to propose, at the outset, is that the "solution" to the above problematics may be found in another point of continuity both across and at, even as, the center of these crises, a point that, while not necessarily more intrinsically stable, has proven all the more important to be kept stable. What has persisted and to no small degree enabled the persistence of both spectacular society and its image of violence is *the image of the bourgeois subject*, bound up within the twinned fields of capitalism and cinema that together require it as its central figure and protagonist.[4] It is through this enduring figure, this mythic image, and the equally enduring formal structures that tend to and attend its re/production, that we can begin to more fully understand the absolute necessity for Hollywood cinema's most clichéd scenarios and scenarizations of violence, in what is perhaps this cinema's, this subject's, and their common mode of production's most critical moment.

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[4] Indeed, as Fredric Jameson observes in "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture," "with this new historical visibility [even] capitalism becomes objectified and dramatized as an actor and as a subject of history with an allegorical intensity and simplicity that had not been the case since the 1930s." (*Signatures of the Visible*, 52; brackets mine.)

CODIFYING THE VIOLENT: INAUGURAL PROSCRIPTIONS & PERSISTENT TENDENCIES

> *The old studio system was so hypocritical. They were constantly fearful of being accused of instilling in youth the glory of the outlaw, so that they had these rules, for instance, that you couldn't fire a gun in the same frame with somebody getting hit. You had to have a (sic), literally, a film cut, in between. So I thought that if we're gonna show this we should* show *it, we should show what it looks like, when somebody gets shot, that shooting somebody is* not *a sanitized event, it's not …* immaculate. *There's an* enormous *amount of blood, there's an* enormous *amount of* horror *of change that takes place when that occurs. And we were in the middle of the Vietnamese [sic] War; what you saw on television was every bit, perhaps even more bloody than what we were showing on film.*[5]
>
> Arthur Penn
> Director of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)

> *(H)istorical events alone could not discredit Classic Hollywood's traditional forms; only the audience's perception of events as anomalous could raise that challenge, and in the post-war period, the traditional categories had forestalled such perceptions from developing.*[6]
>
> Robert B. Ray
> *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*

To open a discussion of the specific textual and discursive interventions that Hollywood cinema has made and continues to make into the nexus of violence, class, and politics, we might first look to the basic ways in which that violence is framed, both *narratologically/figuratively* and *formally/scenically*, according to conventional strictures and patterns that trace back to the medium's early recognition as a means of shaping and directing mass consciousness. To this day, the favored techniques of positioning and editing "scenes of violence" – that is, scenes which present defined and definable acts of violence in commission[7] – are informed remnants of the defunct Hays Code. Fully implemented under the Production Code Association in 1934 – crucially, the depths of the Great Depression, monopoly capitalism's defining crisis – the Code, in unabashedly political and moralistic terms, dictated and codified parameters of not only acceptable content, but also the formal language by which commercial cinema was allowed to convey that content as narrative information. While some of its specific tenets and regulatory proscriptions have long been abandoned in actual or explicitly defined application (and replaced by the concertedly inexplicit terms and secreted processes by which the current MPAA ratings criteria are applied, as a condition of its sovereign operation and legitimacy), there nonetheless remain the very same persistent tendencies, equally unspoken but more potent for it, fully embedded into the very formalism of narrative cinematic discourse. It is in these originary formal and thematic strictures – both explicit and tacit – that we can begin to understand this cinema's abiding and enduring role in maintaining not only a certain economy of violence, but also one that ultimately comes most explicitly and desperately to bear on bourgeois class and consumer consciousness.

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[5] Video interview, from the Miramax DVD edition of the BFI documentary *A Century of Cinema: A Personal Journey Through American Movies with Martin Scorsese* (1995). Emphases mine, as approximations of Penn's.

[6] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 248.

[7] The following chapter will work to move away from this restricted notion of "violence as/in intersubjective acts" to establish categories of "violent images" in ways that are less tied to that phenomenal taxonomy which comprises the visible side of the violent imaginary, the side with which the present chapter is almost exclusively concerned.

In prescribing the narratological and formal treatment of violence, the Code itself was by turns broadly and explicitly prohibitive and strategically obscurantist in its language. Whereas most "categories of concern" (and particularly the sexual/erotic) are explicitly delineated in terms of content and means of presentation – what is and is not permitted to be brought to light, and in what ways, all exhaustively regimented in concrete and authoritative detail – those that entail and pertain to violence are only obliquely defined, and (in a mode that should be familiar by now) attended no further than whatever *external effects* any such presentation might inspire on the part of the viewing subject, from imitative behavior to sympathy for the commissioner of an illicitly-identified violent act. Given the externalizing forces exerted by the violent imaginary – which, if at first blush paradoxically, relentlessly *return* the "problem of violence" to the social sphere, maintaining it (or at least its image) as a persistent, *potential* problem – this is unsurprising enough. But in the concern over the potential translation from "received information" to "illicit/immoral action," another more or less explicit mandate is introduced: that the function of commercial cinema, "properly regulated," is both an apparatus and extension of the law, a mandate ultimately predicated on the proposition that the medium's power to shape social consciousness and even action is such that it presents something of a crisis of potentiality that demands strategic regulation.

If not exactly recognized from a perspective of the same kind or complexity that Kracauer's revelatory ontology holds as its triumphal end, or as intimately connected with a progressive, Deleuzian notion of the cinema "working through" the compartmentalizing and alienating fissures between thought, sensation, and action, this anxious (and *expressly* *articulated*) recognition of the medium's capacity to reveal and project both the real conditions and ideal image of a society – and that this presented a very real problem to be solved – certainly speaks to the general, paranoiac investment on the part of any structure in dominance to protect itself from *any* externally motivated or self-incurred subversion, and moreover from any immediate connection to, let alone mass consciousness of, any and all complicity with the very real conditions of material and social reality that the medium inherently reveals. That the "subjects of concern" which put the processes of these regulations in motion were not only the bourgeois subject as popularly defined at the time (e.g., the white middle-class male) but the entire scope of an infantilized and econo-politically disenfranchised social and film-going populace – women, children, immigrants, the illiterate, and the poor – fully gives the lie to not only the clear class interests at stake, but also (to telegraph a later point of consideration) the Lukácsian problematic of the bourgeois (non-)relation to totality qua the image of the social whole (an image, as Kracauer has contended, with which the medium has an ontologically revelatory affinity).[8]

Coordinate with this mandate, as an effect that is anything but incidental (and certainly not accidental), the idea of violence *as* violence – "in itself" – has already been displaced, and has begun to fade into the out of field. By the definitions and nomenclature of the Code, the idea of what constitutes violence in any form becomes little more than that which is both the explicit problem and implicit subject of the law's discretionary diktat: that is, what can be defined exclusively by terms of juridicial categories, which of course belies both the proscriptive relation of law to violence and the necessity of the latter's continuing presence as the condition for the very constitution and necessity of the former. In this, violence "itself," explicitly defined, drops out of the picture, reduced to a categorical generality of purely relational terms that, interestingly enough, explicitly reveals both the essence of violence and the imaginary terms by which it is subsequently defined: an opaque generality which prohibits less "violence" in terms of specifically defined acts, but rather *any* willful, subversive, anarchistic, and fundamentally amoral irrupture of law, a generality in the form of "common sense" which always-already presupposes a certain "natural" presupposition of the terms (and the terms of the terms) that themselves comprise the law-violence equation, by and for images of "good subjects" – bourgeois subjects – identified with and defined by that equation.

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[8] For a concise but fuller account of the "bare history" of the Code's emergence, effects, and political reconfigurations between 1908 and 1934, see Belton, "The Production Code," 135-137. He prefaces that history by saying, simply and directly, that what precipitated cinematic regulations was the fact that "(a)s more and mode middle-class patrons (and women and children) began to frequent the nickelodeons in 1905-1908, both the images on the screen and the physical conditions under which films were viewed in the theaters became an issue of social concern." (135)

It is thus that while "murder" and "methods of crime" *are* explicitly identified and considered in some detail as specific sites of regulatory prohibition under the Code's ordinally and ideologically first-most taxonomic category, "Crimes Against the Law," violence *per se* is not attended, and much less defined, in detail in the text (and certainly not to the exhaustive level of regimentation and description as the second-most category, "Sex").[9] What might be broadly considered "violence" falls, though for the most part only through interpretation and interpolation, under the general rubric of *sin* in the discretionary *Reasons Underlying Particular Application*:

> 1. *Sin and evil* enter into the story of human beings and hence in themselves *are dramatic material.*
> 2. In the use of this material, it must be distinguished between *sin which repels* by its very nature, and *sins which often attract.*
>   a. In the first class come murder, most theft, many legal crimes, lying, hypocrisy, cruelty, etc.
>   b. In the second class come sex sins, sins and crimes of apparent heroism, such as banditry, daring thefts, leadership in evil, organized crime, revenge, etc.
>
>   The first class needs far less care in treatment, as sins and crimes of this class are naturally unattractive. The audience instinctively condemns and is repelled. Hence the important objective must be to avoid the hardening of the audience, especially of those who are young and impressionable, to the thought and fact of crime. People can become accustomed even to murder,

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[9] As Stephen Prince observes in his exhaustive and authoritative study, *Classical Film Violence: Designating and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968*, "there is abundant material in the Code and its amendments dealing with crime, criminals, murder, weapons, and brutality, but there is nothing on 'violence,' a category that does not exist in the Code. One might object, however, and claim that violence is indeed covered. If it is not named directly, the Code's terminology and particular applications nevertheless point to it. After all, cruelty, brutality, murder, and machine-gun killings are quite clearly violent acts, and plenty of movies over the years have shown these. The Code has a lot to say about such acts, and the PCA was extremely attentive to their depiction in classical Hollywood film because censor boards routinely cut this material." (32) In addition to this, at least a passing note should be made here, as the terms by which problematic sexual content is defined are precisely of the same logic as those of what might be called "recognized violence." Here too, the language is rife with fears of the violation of sanctities – from specific acts, such as sodomy, to institutions, such as marriage, to even racial integrity, in "miscegenation." In this sense, and a very real one at that, the Code is simultaneously unconcerned with violence per se, but absolutely centered around its multiple possible conceptualizations outside of the discrete sphere of crimes entailing violence (even sexual crimes, such as rape and lascivious presentation of nude children, are presented separately as their own kind of deviation). Thus, while I have chosen to take the Code more or less directly "on its own terms" in a literal interpretation for the sake of this specific argument, more indeed could be said along these lines.

> cruelty, brutality, and repellent crimes, if these are sufficiently repeated. The second class needs real care in handling, as the response of human natures to their appeal is obvious. (...)[10]

Shortly thereafter, the following qualification is added:

> The treatment of crimes against the law must not:
> 1. *Teach methods* of crime.
> 2. *Inspire potential criminals* with a desire for imitation.
> 3. *Make criminals seem heroic* and justified.
>
> *Revenge* in modern times shall not be justified. In lands and ages of less developed civilization and moral principles, revenge may sometimes be presented. This would be the case especially in places where no law exists to cover the crime because of which revenge is committed.[11]

What is most notable in these passages is not only the reductively univectorial, unicausal, and unilateral logic that (however disingenuously) states as its explicit end the eradication of those socially unproductive violences by stemming their potential sources of inspiration (as, again, the logic that the presented is glorified and sanctioned by default), nor simply the moralized and ideologized character of these prohibitions, marking them unapologetically as a repressive means of social engineering dependent upon the preexisting and perpetual internalization of a theocratized bourgeois consciousness (e.g., the presupposition that murder, theft, legal crimes and mendacity, as not simply legal crimes but cardinal sins, are "naturally unattractive"), nor even the paternalistic boldness of the proclamations in their cursory and patronizing appeals to the commonsensical "obviousness" of the need for such interventions.[12] Extending from these explicit messages, and coupled with the persistent, relentless necessity to sublimate the thought of violence from the conceptual to the visible, the implicit project here is equally striking in its unspoken investments: to deflect the thought of violence from the structural to the individual (in the form of agents who willfully assert themselves against the law), to distance and parcel out the labor and proprietary space of violence (and in ways decidedly not limited to those assumed-to-be-external "lands and ages of less developed civilization and moral principles"), and, perhaps most problematically, to localize, isolate, and acknowledge the power of violence qua marker of individualist agency in order to subsequently deny and disinvest it.

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[10] Belton, "The Production Code," 146-147.

[11] Belton, "The Production Code," 147.

[12] As Prince rightly observes, even in these cases where the supposed obviousness of violence's categorical presence and presumed effects preclude its naming as such and justify the Code's admonitions as both a matter of fact and a matter of course, "more than mere terminology is at work here. The Code does not refer to 'violence' becase the term and the idea were not part of industry and and public discourse as they are today. One reason for this is that filmmakers had not yet begun the intensive stylistic elaboration of violence that would become normative beginning in the late 1960s. (...) (T)he violence in classical Hollywood film is inscribed within categories that are deemed, in the views of the period, to be objectionable – guns in the hands of criminals, gruesome experiments conducted by mad scientists, brutal killings carried out by monsters or mobsters. Protests against the violence in classical Hollywood pictures centered on these referents – gangsters and ghouls, law-breakers, monsters, and the *crimes* they perpetrated. Crime and horror films, for example, were routinely attacked because of the referential frame within which the violence occurred. Protesters considered those frames to be unhealthy and unwholesome and to undermine social values and the public order." (*Classical Film Violence*, 32; emphases his)

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We have already explored, in Chapter One, how the principle of general subsumption and sublimation into the visible is central to the very concept of violence, and moreover that violence in contemporary thought is the conceptual hub which connects notions of self and other as their fundamental means of relation and determination; the ways in which these deflections take shape and form to find more specific and politically useful loci in contemporary Hollywood cinema, however, have yet to be more fully accounted for. Certainly, to return to and reframe Levinas' claim that "violence must aim at a face," for the violent imaginary to sustain itself, and moreover for it to retain its fundamental utility in the mediation of the very thought of violence in the wake of late capitalism's myriad dispersals, violence must enter and be registered in an economy wherein it circulates among, rests upon, and becomes proprietary to certain identified, individuated, and invested *figures*, certain *faces* of violence: figures and faces of the animalistic, unrefined, or uncivilized – in short, the ever-more malleable image of the now-global lumpenproletariat – that today are integral to a spectacular economy invested in preserving implicitly antagonistic social arrangements and, consequently, in dissolving the thought of the active politics of violence.

But the play of character-based figuration, for what it's worth (both quite a bit and very little, as we'll see), is not exclusively or even most significantly the means by which this cinema continues to parcel out and package violence for the presumed-to-be bourgeois audience: coextensive with these first base principles, the formal regimentation of spaces (and spatiality in general) also plays an integral, and in many ways even more fundamental, role. The very notion of the bourgeoisie is, of course, historically spatial, owing to the relative sanctity of the township that initially lent this property-owning capitalist class its name and identity: the communal spatial register qua social *habitus*, separated on the one hand from the peripheral serfdom of the proletariat and from the manor halls of power on the other. The persistent figuration of the protected, protective, and demarcated sphere of civilized, privatized social space, is certainly maintained at the narratological level, and moreover across genres, as a constitutive component of bourgeois identity and sovereignty in contemporary commercial cinema.

But this longstanding privileging of definitional spatial separation is reiterated and reinscribed more deeply than simply within the affirmative-didactic narratives of contestation. Both in accord and in tension with the infinite spatial transposability required and afforded by the conditions of late capitalism, the *general spatiality of scenes*, from their internal shot relations to the scene as a discrete spatio-temporal unit, can themselves be recognized as logically analogous and instrumental means of reparceling *proprietary spaces* within which all sorts of values can be inscribed, and which keep safely contained, discretely registered, and sovereignly endowed those valences, ascriptions, functions and threats against which bourgeois consciousness defines itself. Like the walls that define the home and the fence that defines the town, the out of field that defines the scene and the cuts that define the shot establish invisible but indispensable barriers and boundaries, defining what may and may not be contained within their frames, irreducibly conscripting that which they confine to a regulated ordinariness, framed at the most basic level for unproblematic, objectively distanced, harmless and consequenceless consumption.

Via these spatial regimentations, the violent imaginary moves relatively independently of character-based figuration, the spatializing tendencies not only sharpening, but ultimately determining the narratological course and ideological force of the figural elements. From the presentational demarcation and establishment of recognizably criminogenic spaces (the inner city, the roadside motel, the "Third World," and so forth – though these are also, to an extent, invested in the figures which even if unshown are presumed to occupy and thus overdeterminately define them) to more general relations between and within otherwise invested spaces, *every* narrative cinematic scene-space immediately presents a charged, chirotic space, a space thus constituted not only in its overdetermining signifying content (specific, invested figures set within or against the totality of the cine-real *mise-en-scène*) but in its very parameters of acceptable inclusions (the scene, in being set, as *set*) and, consequently, in its relations to other, similarly constituted sets (the narrative film, in its totality, as large-set).

The implications here are twofold. On the one hand, each cinematic scene-space not only gives necessary rise to whatever expected proprietary actions and events (violent or otherwise) but also contains them, limiting their presence and effects to regimented and demarcated spheres in the field of figuration, to episodic segments bracketed by the scene as such, and more generally to the relentlessly reified and mytho-affirmative space of commercial cinema itself. On the other hand, within the generally consistent economy of spaces established and maintained in the narrative film-text, relational and causal complexes arise despite the dividuating parceling of spaces, with narrative syntax entailing both a linking of cause and effect across editorially conjoined spaces (e.g., across sequential shots, as in contiguity editing or shot/reverse structures) but also, in this same movement, sanctifying that action, *across* the imposed distance, by maintaining relative spatial integrities and identities. While the decisive parceling of cinematic space into opposed proprietary spheres is critical to maintain the relational character of each space-set and its inclusions (the abject and the ideal all the clearer in their essential and Manichean character when immediately counterposed), their proximity in their textual point of contact, and the relational causal-consequential complex that arises therefrom, poses a particular problem to prevailing notions of sanctity and justification when acts of violence are at stake.

Both the essence and the importance of this problem are manifest in yet another key prohibition of Code-era Hollywood cinema, unscripted into the text of the Code itself, but acquiescently understood by the filmmakers beholden to it and immediately recognizable as a formal paradigm. This unspoken rule was simple: in the depiction of a shooting (if, of course, it was "absolutely necessary" to depict), for example, the shooter could not be shown in the commission of the act within the same frame-space as the victim – they were required to be spatially separated by a cut.[13] This tacit formal law is all the more important to note because of the rigid strictures by which its adherence was compulsory – and when it was not. Gangster films, for example, were permitted to evade this unspoken law insofar as the actors (and the spaces they inhabit) involved were, by an equally unspoken division of ideological labor, representative of a lower societal element and thus designated by default as violent in character. By contrast, Westerns (that most endemically American of cinematic genres) absolutely could not deviate from the pattern, insofar as the white-hat-wearing protagonist, while necessarily violent when compelled by external circumstances and justified by higher external ends, could not be so intimately connected with the commission, to say nothing of the consequences, of such a categorically heinous act.

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[13] In addition to Arthur Penn's above statement, Clint Eastwood discloses and discusses this "compact" and its generic considerations in an interview with Terry Gross on *Fresh Aire* (WHYY, Boston, MA: first aired 21 Nov 96, redistributed and rebroadcast by National Public Radio on 7 Mar 03). It should also be said, of course, that in these and countless other instances filmmakers continually found ingenous ways of circumventing both explicit and implicit codifications for how to present "objectionable content." In the case of violence, I refer the reader again to Prince's *Classical Film Violence*, particularly chapters 3 ("Elaborating Gun Violence") and 4 ("Throwing the Extra Punch").

While on the surface these are simply generic permissibilities and constraints, they operate on precisely the same ethical and technical principles, both absolutely dependent on the establishment of relational distinctions between proximal spaces within which apposite and opposed values of justice and force can be attributed and encoded (in other words, a formal ethics and an ethical form). In each case, these specific spaces are concertedly overdetermined, endowed with and defined by a complex of relationally specific attributions (such as morality, juridicial standing, and socially-productive value) that are every bit as concrete and affective as the other aggregated signifiers at play (the square-jawed lawman in the white hat, the unctuous and swarthy Mafia *uffizi*, etc.). Each space, moreover, is unambiguously recognizable and understood in its specific attributional mode by its immediate opposition to another, proximal space, a proximal opposition which emerges most directly in the exchanges enabled by intercutting in the dialectical and dialogical shot-reverse pattern that marks so many cinematic confrontations and conversations alike (the encounter with the other, of course, always in some way swings both ways). This standardized, conventional pattern not only provides a measure of dialogical and dialectical distinction between spaces (*here*, on the *one* hand, *there*, on the *other*) but equally, in this apposition of opposed spaces, spatially and formally reinscribes the terms of contestation and self-determination from which violence and identity alike are so often understood.

The cut-away required in the Western, then, is a marker less of denial of direct culpability than of justification and affirmation *through* separation: the spatial and identificatory integrity of the *juste* bourgeois/protagonist distanced from and unpolluted by the corrupted, criminogenic, and hence proprietarily violent space of the other. By the same token, the spatializing separation imposed by the cut in the above case of the Western enacts, through this invisible and unconsciously registered degree of distancing, a likewise invisible but decisive and registered degree of *sovereign absolution.* Absent any measure of spatial distancing and segmentation, and moreover without the additional, supplementary, and complementary reframings such a segmentation permits (for example, in the focus on faces in close-ups and reaction shots which manifest affects of rage, animalism, fear, resignation, sadness, determination, stoicism, and so forth), the twinned negative force of judgment and affirmative force of justification dissipates, the moral-affective valences of each figure and each action become confounded in shared, undemarcated and unbroken space, the economy becomes unsustainably (and that is to say *truly*) symmetrical and equitable, in need of decisive arbitration.

In the separation of these spaces, in their parceling out, another, invisible space emerges in the text, imposed from its outside but demanded within: the moment of the sovereign decision and distinction, manifest in the cut (invisible and unseen, the decision of the editor, the decisions of production, the very labor of ideology and the production of the image of justice, imposed as immediately and naturally as the blink of an eye), opening the simultaneously infinite and collapsed space of the separation itself: *the space of justice*. This *third space*, *between* the shots, between the frames that circumscribe and contain the force of law as imparted upon and embodied by the protagonist "on the one hand" and the deserving victim "on the other," is the space of an indissoluble ethical injunction, of the invisible and external intervention of justice and the sovereign decision: from this instantaneous enactment of spatializing force, now two sides to the coin, right and wrong, the terms of conflict and debate resolved in a weighted ideological dissymmetry that takes the form of a natural formal symmetry. The subsequent *negotiation* between figures and spaces, enacted by and inferred in the shot-reverse, "returns" violence to the encounter of clearly defined, individuated and opposed forces, to the image of dialogism and discourse in the mode of the force of law, to the concrete visualization of cause and effect, to the sphere of means and ends both connected and absolved by the transcendental hand of justice, moved by the force of law.

Three inclusive and intertwined considerations are thus introduced, and to this day maintained, within these most general formal constraints: an ideological-attributional consideration, a spatio-causal consideration, and, coincident with both of these, a sovereign consideration. Each of these three fundamental considerations, in their own ways, come to bear on specific facets of the bourgeois subjectivity – ideality, separation, and sanctity – to which commercial cinema most innately attends, and which, by the end of the American 1960s, had fallen into critical discursive disrepair (a crumbling not least emblematized in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*'s explosive parodization of its values, morality, sanctity, and barely-sublimated aggressivity and violence). What we can witness in response to this crisis is Hollywood cinema's attempts not simply to generally reinscribe the image of the bourgeoisie in accord with its (at base ideological and conservative) "certain tendencies," but particularly in ways that come to bear on violence in relation to that subject, that subject's very relations to violence: procedures which at every turn entail restabilizations of class and consumer consciousness in light of their own destabilizations in the rapidly dawning spectacular age.

The ideological-attributional facet of such constructions is, for the most part, central to violent imaginary's specific function as a support-mechanism for the notion and privileging of the bourgeois subject in the contemporary space of late-capitalist geopolitical relations. The ideality of the bourgeoisie always entertains and entails notions of separation, demarcation, and from these, civilization. With this, violence is simultaneously displaced into and constituted as an antinomic and inaccessible exteriority, as the unthought or outside of the sphere of bourgeois consciousness, and indeed its very mode of existence: with violence situated as the antithesis of civilization, discourse, and law, "being bourgeois" (indeed, "bourgeois Being") always entails a fundamental and aggressively maintained material and conceptual distance from violence in whatever form.

Is it as much the case, then, that the bourgeoisie is defined by a certain relation to violence as that violence *itself* is defined by a certain bourgeois relation to it. And both propositions are crucial: the first case presupposes that this kind of subject (a deified, untouchable subject) is defined by both a distance from violence and its effects (protected, safe from those spheres), and certainly by a distance from any complicity with or enactment of it (non-culpable in notions of structural violence, and civilized to the degree that no material violence is enacted on their part). But the second case is different, as it presupposes the conditions of the first, and takes those conditions as operative terms in determining what violence is in the first place. The first, then, bears on class consciousness, but always in the interests of the second, which bears on consumer consciousness; two parts of the same whole, both propositions indispensable, but which we will consider in turn presently.

This particular definitional schema is important to note, because, to be sure, the ideality of "the bourgeois" is not historically constant, however much (and especially inasmuch as) its image is otherwise: rather, that ideal is itself immanent to the particular arrangements of discourse and power in a given mode of capitalism. As Donald Lowe usefully suggests in his *History of Bourgeois Perception*, "(t)he 'bourgeois' was not a static ideal-type, as envisaged by Max Weber, with a single career which we can follow across time. The bourgeoisie was a changing social formation in different social structures, never an identity."[14] Moreover, as Lowe argues throughout his book, what both constitutes a particular concept and function of "the bourgeoisie" and allows for the general persistence as a category of social being is most fundamentally a matter of *perspectivity*: the proprietary individuation of perspectival vision (of a piece with Quattrocento representational paradigms) on the one hand and the objectivity of that perspective which is its correlate on the other. These, and perhaps only these, can be regarded as the atavistic and germinal "constants" at stake, around which any number developments or reconfigurations are permissible so long as this core, which fixes *a specific relational framework between subject and object*, remains undisturbed. So while the ideal itself – how it is constituted *as* ideal – is not historically constant, the consistent point of privileging of the bourgeoisie as a perceptual and relational ideality is; even when it falls into disrepair, it is recuperated, not by itself (as such fundamental labor is its unthought anyway) but by the totality that operationally requires it as a constant: both an ideal persistent figure and a figure of ideal persistence.

Thus, the persistence *of* this figure, and especially in moments of intrinsic or extrinsic crisis that threaten to do it and all it represents away, is of paramount importance. Certainly, we might ask whether one of late capitalism's central antinomies, parallel to and intertwined with the maintenance of a certain image of violence as a plane of operative consistency, is this absolute reliance on the persistence of a certain figure of the bourgeoisie, despite the fact that such a figure, more than ever, is itself today more an abstracted imaginary than a concrete social category corresponding to economic reality, as part and parcel with the sweeping reconfigurations of that reality and the modes of its consciousness permitted within spectacular society. This tension, to a fundamental degree, arises precisely as a result of a certain triumph of its axiomatics: in the additive process of adding new axioms to permit its perpetual expansion, it seems, nothing substantive has replaced or modified either the notion or role of the bourgeois subject within its operational schemata; in other words, this figure is above all else what facilitates and thus permits and justifies its continuous expansion. It is the linchpin and the promise held forth – a weakened link and empty promise to be sure, but absolutely vital: *the star of the show.*

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[14] Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception*, 24.

In the name of systemic continuity and consistency, molding the bourgeois subject in an entirely new image, to say nothing of replacing it within or removing it from the equation, would simply be untenable: the very notion of such a subject is central to the enduring thought of capitalism itself, to say nothing of its operations. So while it is arguable that contemporary global-capitalist structures are in any meaningful way truly "post-bourgeois" (indeed, in a certain but very real sense, quite the opposite), the stratifications and separations between spheres of production and consumption are, particularly today, diffused to the point that the classicist notion of "the bourgeoisie" is substantively unmoored from any particularly meaningful economic or material context, and hence from any meaningful recognition *of* that context within the sphere of the first-world gated community. Yet it persists, if not in name than *in spirit*, as something like tradition, and endures, as something quite more like an article of religious faith (the image of the chosen ones, "God's people"), and ascends to myth, as an self-perpetuating ideality to which to perpetually aspire, a nostalgic-futurist simulacrum, an "incomplete project" (to borrow Habermas' brilliant formulation in word and spirit) whose end itself is a being and an ideality always-already incomplete and incommensurate.

Within the potential failure of bourgeois ideology in late capitalism, and in the desperate discursive means to keep it alive (or at least on life support, in suspended animation) in the destabilization of that ideology's legitimizing structures, the latter two considerations – the spatio-causal and the sovereign – begin to take shape and heightened importance. In the case of the sovereign, there are the same two operational definitions at play in these scenarios as in our earlier discussion of *obsession and exception* in the previous chapter. The first is more simple, borrowing from the primarily economic notion of the state-form: the notion of sovereignty as relates the twinned conception of autonomy and integrity, the right to defend that space by justification of self-protection and, by extension, the liberal-democratic ideals of identity, individuation, and self-determination. Vis-à-vis the bourgeois subject, so conceptually central to this image of the state, the terms of sovereign right are eminently transferable (in it more than it, the state "is" this subject, which manifests its state's ideality as a condition of its *own* inclusion in the latter's set). But this more common definition, however substantive in the schematic justifications of violence which place certain "non-identified violences" (be they military, global-economic, or cultural-ideological) outside of the sphere of legal definition or individual punitive culpability, does not entirely get to the heart of (and should not be confused with) the notion of sovereignty Agamben advances, which comes equally to bear on these matters. Rather than attending the question of the law's positive or attributional applicability to the subject (that is, what it explicitly allows the subject to do in and for each's own "best interests") Agamben gets at the concept of sovereignty and right in a different way, by examining its structure as not one of stable juridicial prohibitions referential to the presence and continuity of transcendental truth (the image *of* sovereignty, essentially), but as essentially provisional, with the latter characteristic manifest primarily at the point of the arbitrary but calculated decision: one not of inclusion and exclusion (you may and may not do this, absolutely or in certain defined circumstances) but of occlusion and exception (the law may be suspended, but not dissolved, in this instance, circumstance, or space, in the interest of preserving law and the subject of law).

Both of these formulations come into contact with the spatial/relational and causal/consequential problematics introduced in the late-capitalist moment. In this moment, both of these latter problematics are reconfigured and informed not least by what could be called (and analogous to Arendt's commentary on the Cold War thought of violence under a totalizing politics of pure means) a consumptive politics of pure ends, whereby all consciousness of production and consequence are moved to the same inaccessible exteriority as their materiality: out of sight, out of mind, so to speak. By effectively displacing not only forces of labor and production to a series of inaccessible externalities (culminating in the geopolitical extremity of the amorphous factory-state of the undifferentiated "Third World"), but also everything that the image of the proletariat historically entails, violence too follows that path. Categorically excluded from the proprietary space and very character of the bourgeoisie, and all the while by means adhering to the myriad principles of demarcation and division (labor, equity, justice) that inform and conscribe them, violence becomes the ascriptional curse and Sisyphean burden of the proletarian(ized) other – "at home and abroad." Violence, from this *perspective*, is absolutely framed as a problem *of* other places, *for* other people, and *in* other spaces, to be contained and met with a corrective counterviolence only when their relatively primitive means of political containment and constraint absolutely fail, or worse, threaten to impinge upon the spaces from which it has been expunged; in local and global spheres, the "white man's burden," so to speak, continues to be to deal with such irruptions and confrontations expediently (be it defensively or preemptively) and with uniformly unilateral discretion from the immaterial(ized) space of sovereign right.

It is clear enough that the point has long been reached in bourgeois consciousness where violence is an afterthought, something that happens someplace else, even if it happens all the time, and even if, as contemporary media relentlessly place us in the objective position to understand and stand as constant, vigilant witness, it happens seemingly everywhere and at all times. Separated "in fact" both geographically (as has repeatedly been the case with the American experience of war) and socio-politically (as is the perpetual case with, and condition of, the bourgeois subject), violence, absolutely caulked onto the figure of the bourgeois' other, must be categorically maintained as the negatively defining characteristic of the bourgeoisie: its deepest unthought, its threatening rival, its condition of possibility. Such is the enduring condition of the prevailing Western-democratic thought of violence – but one that, once penetrated by contemporary crises of legitimation, consciousness, and the historical, threatens to collapse alongside the subject it entails.

So what, then, *is* this bourgeois subject and its constitutive consciousness *today*, what movements and machinations have lead it to this point, what desires, anxieties, and limits of inclusion does it permit, and how, ultimately, is *contemporary* Hollywood cinema entangled in its development and current constitution? If violence is today necessarily conceived as proprietary to specifically demarcated and distanced spheres of disenfranchised or otherwise abject social arrangements (in whatever "socially destructive," "unproductive," or worse, revolutionary forms, from street crime to gang wars to riots to the general strike), and is presented within a discursive field which simultaneously sensationalizes and denegates its power and politicality, how and in what ways is this cinema complicit with the violent imaginary and active in reinflecting the spaces and faces of violence? And if the "ideal subject" in late capitalism is, *mutatis mutandis*, still fundamentally (and, fundamentally, problematically) bourgeois in constitution, and if commercial cinema, working as a generally homogenizing force, inexorably privileges images and relations thereto also "proper to" this ideality, what are the consequences of these demands for the thought of violence, so tightly if implicitly interwound with the thought of class, and what are the means by which these processes have enacted and exacted their desired and requisite ends?

To work through these questions, we might trace out two discrete but interrelated paths: first, how contemporary bourgeois class consciousness and the crisis of history that impacts it are mediated in the field of cinematic figuration, and second, how the general tenets and problematics presented in that field correspond with and inform narrative formal principles in the re/presentation of violence. But before this, we might take a cue from Jean-Louis Comolli, who says that

> it is naïve to locate *mise en scène* solely on the side of the camera: it is just as much, and before the camera intervenes, everywhere where the social regulations order the place, the behavior and almost the 'form' of subjects in the various configurations in which they are caught (and which do not demand the same type of performance: here authority, here submission; standing out or standing aside; etc.; from one system of social relation to another, the place of the subject changes and so does the subject's capture in the look of others).[15]

Hence, a brief sojourn into the social conditions and crises at hand before "returning" to the formal and figural questions with which we began.

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[15] Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," 758.

From Crisis to Class Consequencelessness: Upsetting the Stage, Deterritorializing Violence

> *It is clear that the society of the spectacle is also one in which all social identities have dissolved and in which everything that for centuries represented the splendor and misery of the generations succeeding themselves on Earth has by now lost all its significance. The different identities that have marked the tragicomedy of universal history are exposed and gathered with a phantasmagorial vacuity in the global petite bourgeoisie – a petite bourgeoisie that constitutes the form in which the spectacle has realized parodistically the Marxian project of a classless society.*[16]
>
> Giorgio Agamben
> "Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*"

> *(T)he objective limits of capitalist production become the limits of the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie. The older 'natural' and 'conservative' forms of domination had left unmolested the forms of production of whole sections of the people they ruled and therefore exerted by and large a traditional and unrevolutionary influence. Capitalism, by contrast, is a revolutionary form par excellence. The fact that it must necessarily remain in ignorance of the objective economic limitations of its own system expresses itself as an internal, dialectical contradiction in its class consciousness. This means that* formally *the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie is geared to economic consciousness. And indeed the highest degree of unconsciousness, the crassest form of 'false consciousness' always manifests itself when the conscious mastery of economic phenomena appears to be at its greatest. From the point of view of the relation of consciousness to society this contradiction is expressed as* the irreducible antagonism between ideology and economic base.[17]
>
> Georg Lukács
> *History and Class Consciousness*

> *Do I contradict myself?*
> *Very well then I contradict myself,*
> *(I am large, I contain multitudes).*
>
> Walt Whitman
> *Song of Myself, 51*

Among the multiple crises of the American late-1960s, each in their own way constituting a problematization in the bourgeois image and thought of violence, the era's spatial and spatializing crisis – the generalized collapse and contraction of social, economic, and geopolitical space, their hitherto independent constitutions and demarcations – is perhaps most important to consider at this point, particularly vis-à-vis the local impact of the Vietnam War. To be sure, the expansion of the space of capitalism itself (its scope, its networks of flow and exchange, including networks of information and informatics), as a matter of course forcing a contraction of the global-political sphere, carried with it a wholesale reorganization of what space "means" in terms of geopolitical borders and sovereignty. Against this backdrop, the Vietnam War neatly metonymized that collapse and – with informatic networks relaying distant and homefront eruptions of violence, bringing the era's manifest violence of war, protest, and state control into the public eye and the sanctity of domestic space – the crisis specific to the popular spatial consciousness of violence. As Ray notes,

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[16] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 87-88.

[17] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 64. Emphases his.

> the critical events of the 1960s became demonstrations of the shrinkage suffered by the physical and metaphorical space on which American institutions had presumably depended. In particular, the naggingly interminable Vietnam War, following World War II and Korea, and conducted on the brink of either side's potential nuclear intervention, came to suggest a contraction of worldwide space. Even more important, steadily increasing internal dissent, symbolized by the ease with which thousands of protestors could appear in Washington, was interpreted as signaling the disappearance of what Daniel Bell called 'insulated space,' the figurative 'room' that supposedly had enabled American culture's conflicting values to coexist without violence. Under the aegis of the frontier theory, even one of the period's triumphs, the Apollo space program, seemed to dramatize with its photographs of the earth how limited the world's space actually was.[18]

If the very notion of America itself – and particularly as paragon of democratic civilization, relatively (and progressing to a state of absolutely) free from the presence or impact of violence from within or without – could no longer be sustained in concrete geographical, political, or even economic terms, this crisis could be understood as being equally invested in and as the image of the bourgeoisie, itself identified with, and even figurally embodying, that "insulated space" within which violence had intruded and made itself at home. In protests and riots, in popular activism and state reactivism, and in every home through every television screen, the consciousness of violence and all of its social, economic, and political entailments had fitfully but forcefully intruded into the totality of social space, public and private, directly and vicariously engaged, with no space safe from its challenge. Shattered, imploded, and reconstituted as an integrated complex of *saturated and conflicting* spaces, *all* space explicitly becomes a space of contest and contestation, a space of implicit, potential, and now-too-often actual violence implicating *all* its inhabitants in sins of either commission or omission.

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[18] Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, 253.

Alongside this relatively radical popular destabilization of the violent imaginary's spatial terms, a parallel popular crisis of class consciousness was introduced, impacting the image of the bourgeoisie vis-à-vis their complicit relation to violence. If not yet fully within the broadest sphere of the thought of inequities inhering in global economic relations (specifically, a popular consciousness of the new global proletariat as a consequence of multinational capitalism's colonialist-imperialist impulses), we can certainly recognize at this time a localized crystallization of popular consciousness around the role of socioeconomic status in America vis-à-vis voluntary and conscripted individual participation in the Vietnam War – an emblematic concretization of the true face of "class warfare," recognized as such. If to varying depths and degrees, in the public revelation and recognition of these inequities, these underlying divisions of labor and economic determinisms now clearly evident and hyperbolized in the nakedly visible expenditure of so many proletarian (and, given the draft instituted to correct the dearth of volunteers, increasingly but not equally middle-class) bodies in a service-economy war, a critical awareness of the relative role and status of the nominal "bourgeoisie" to the proletariat expenditures in and for their interests was opened, giving rise to social divisions that, as much as anything, were at base a *class struggle* fought, for the first time in such scale on American soil since the labor riots of the Great Depression, not only in the abstract-ideological terrain of "hearts and minds" but openly, in the streets.[19]

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[19] Of course, this historical moment also entailed other rallying cries for social justice and equality, and ones which yielded somewhat more tangible results in terms of social transformation. But Jameson also notes (if somewhat contentiously) in "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture" that "(w)hat is becoming clearer today is that the demands for equality and justice projected by such groups are not (unlike the politics of social class) intrinsically subversive. Rather, the slogans of populism and the ideals of racial justice and sexual equality were already themselves part and parcel of the Enlightenment itself, inherent not only in a socialist denunciation of capitalism, but even and also in the bourgeois revolution against the ancien régime. The values of the civil rights movement and the women's movement are thus preeminently cooptable because they are already – as ideals – inscribed in the very ideology of capitalism itself; and we must take into account the possibility that these ideals are part of the internal logic of the system, which has a fundamental interest in social equality to the degree to which it needs to transform as many of its subjects or its citizens into identical consumers interchangeable with everybody else. The Marxian position – which includes the ideals of the Enlightenment but seeks to ground them in a material theory of social evolution – argues on the contrary that the system is structurally unable to realize such ideals even where it has an economic interest in doing so." (*Signatures of the Visible*, 36-37) For Jameson, then, "(t)his is the sense in which the categories of race and sex as well as the generational ones of the student movement are theoretically subordinate to the categories of social class, even where they may seem practically and politically a great deal more relevant. Yet it is not adequate to argue the importance of class on the basis of an underlying class reality beneath a relatively more classless appearance. There is, after all, a reality of the appearance just as much as a reality behind it; or, to put it more concretely, social class is not merely a structural fact but also very significantly a function of class consciousness, and the latter, indeed, ends up producing the former just as surely as it is produced by it." (37) But indeed, even when "discrete" class concerns were at stake, the notion of the capitalism's intrinsic validity

In all these ways – spatial, ideological, political, and material – this is not just an historical crisis for the bourgeoisie, but a *crisis of the historical*: of the manifestation of the historical as Event, intruding upon the even consistency of American Development, revealing that development – and, crucially, the subject central to it – to be very much a part of the messy and contentious processes of history so long denied in the hegemony of middle-class thought, this latter now finally encountering itself, and in a potentially catastrophic way, as an *object of history* in this moment's spatial, political, and (perhaps most importantly) economic crises. As Jameson notes in his reading of Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), for example, the audience's "manifest sympathy" with Sonny's (Al Pacino) "impotent rage" is enabled in large part because of the (at least subtly perceived) proletarianization of middle-class economic reality in the wake of the era's rampant inflation. As he explains,

> this [audience] had witnessed the collapse of the system's legitimacy (and the sapping of the legitimizations on which it was based): not only Vietnam, least of all Watergate, most significantly surely the experience of inflation itself, which is the privileged phenomenon through which *a middle-class audience suddenly comes to an unpleasant consciousness of its own historicity* ..."[20]

This consciousness of historicity and all it entails – up to an including the consciousness of one's own position as an aleatory happenstance of capricious arrangements, as a product of and imbricated in the totality of relations – is not simply unpleasant, but potentially disastrous to the categorical constitution and utility of bourgeois consciousness (and concomitantly to the violent imaginary). This proposition bears on the central theses of Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*: that the very concept of *totality* is one that bourgeois thought and philosophy is unable – or unwilling – to come to terms with; that the mediation or destruction of its image so as to bar access to its consciousness is the

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was never necessarily in contest – that is, the "cultural revolution" at stake on the American stage was never quite one which required, as its prerequisite impetus, the abandonment or overthrow of capitalism in any way; quite to the contrary, the mode of production itself never came fully, systemically into question – but rather to attend the manifestly superstructural injustices and iniquities carried with its classic and contemporary functions, woven inextricably into the fabric of life and thus into the totality of all power relations. This turning-away from – or more to the point, not turning fully enough towards – a truly radical and revolutionary Marxian critique, one that would indeed address and contest material production at a truly basic level, has a clear correlate in the "New Hollywood" filmmakers, and particularly in the American Zoetrope collective: relatively overtly political vis-à-vis many of their "deposed forebears" of the studio system, but ultimately bereft of a politically revolutionary consciousness (as evidenced not only in their films, but also their personal actions: e.g., Coppola's infamous "limousine radicalism," Lucas' empire building, and Spielberg's dewy-eyed populist nostalgicism).

[20] Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture," *Signatures of the Visible*, 43. Brackets and emphases mine.

bourgeoisie's condition of possibility; that this class' privileged stature is absolutely reliant upon the maintenance of an exclusionarily totalizing image *of* totality that accords with its own insular perspective and interests. To encounter this totality as an object of history rather than its subject is catastrophic to the image of history, to the image of totality, to the image of capitalism, to the image of the bourgeois subject, and to the image of violence as non-relational phenomena arising from unrelated processes.

Yet however singular this generally charged and specifically revelatory moment may have been in its disruption of the perceived continuity of American experience and identity (and this despite the totality of apparatuses and forces already well in place and well-equipped to contain and handily reinflect its apprehension and experience), such an opening of popular consciousness to the myriad inequities of class relations operative in capitalist culture is not only not historically unprecedented or unpredictable, it is not even necessarily antithetical to capitalism's pan-systemic demands and the ways in which bourgeois consciousness is maintained. As Lukács explains, even the seemingly catastrophic lifting of the tattered veil that conceals the fundamental and complete dependency of the bourgeoisie on the proletariat (and not the other way around, a situation particularly concretized in the wartime consciousness of Vietnam-era America) is in fact an *inevitability* given the internal contradictions of capitalist social organizations and the ideological superstructure that serves, however tenuously, to both sustain and maintain them.

Moreover, and expounding on the Marxian maxim that history is precisely the history of class struggle, in Lukács' view the fundamental contradiction between economic reality and power relations (a contradiction particularly presented to the late capitalist middle class in their encounter with their historicity) is a crucial precondition for the bourgeoisie, their consciousness, and their hegemony: this "irreducible antagonism between ideology and economic base"[21] inexorably leads to, and moreover *requires*, the perpetuity of the class struggle, its manifestations unique only the specific historical conditions and arrangements within which it may occur and (as is often the case) inevitably be restabilized. For Lukács as for Marx, the class struggle is not merely an aberrance arising from failures of bourgeois ideology (or even, in Deleuzian terms, from axiomatic failures in recoding or reterritorialization), nor is it constituted or attributable solely from the side of the reactionary/revolutionary proletariat: rather, it is the *central fact* of capitalist society, the central fact of the privileging and self-preservative impulses of the bourgeoisie, and the central expression of – and in the case of the proletariat majority, against – the necessary permanence of inequities and a(nta)gonisms upon which such an organization relies.[22] Speaking across the history of post-feudal capitalist organizations and conflicts, Lukács demonstrates both the enduring centrality of the class struggle and its consequences to the characteristics of bourgeois consciousness whence confronted:

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[21] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 64.

> In the class struggle we witness the emergence of all the hidden forces that usually lie concealed behind the façade of economic life, at which the capitalists and their apologists gaze as though transfixed. These forces appear in such a way that they cannot possibly be ignored. (…) But in proportion as the theory and practice of the proletariat made society conscious of this unconscious, revolutionary principle inherent in capitalism, the bourgeoisie was thrown back increasingly on to a conscious defensive. The dialectical contradiction in the 'false' consciousness of the bourgeoisie became more and more acute: the 'false' consciousness was converted into a mendacious consciousness. What had been at first an objective contradiction now became subjective also: the theoretical problem turned into a moral posture which decisively influenced every practical class attitude in every situation and on every issue.[23]

The fundamental character of the class struggle that Lukács isolates here is twofold: both of the alienated and restless proletariat against the conditions of their subordination (the traditional, if somewhat utopian, Marxist paradigm), and also, more importantly, of the bourgeoisie: not with or against the proletariat itself, so much as forced to confront its own unconscious, to attempt to reconcile its own objective contradictions to maintain its self-image, to reassert (and not least for itself) its hegemonic authority in terms of morality, law, and sovereign right, and all this no matter how patently excessive, ridiculous, or contradictory the terms, no matter how those terms further distance and alienate from the very real objective and material conditions which brought about this inaugural, defining, and abiding crisis of irresolvable contradiction in the first place.[24] "With this," Lukács claims,

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[22] As Jameson argues in "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture," the "properly Marxian" and the academic-sociological conceptions of class are radically different: while the latter views class (and classes) as isolated and relatively autonomous strata which can be understood as kinds of self-enclosed systems, the former views class as intrinsically and inextricably (inter)relational, and in this inherently antagonistic. Proceeding from this latter position, he notes, "'The whole of society,' a famous sentence of the *Communist Manifesto* tells us, 'is increasingly split into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly confronting one another: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.' To which we must only add, 1) that this underlying starkly dichotomous class antagonism only becomes fully visible empirically in times of absolute crises and polarization, that is to say, in particular, at the moment of social revolution itself; and 2) that in a henceforth worldwide class system the oppositions in question are evidently a good deal more complicated and difficult to reconstruct than they were within the more representational, or figurable, framework of the older nation state." (*Signatures of the Visible*, 46-47) In this, "each class defines itself in terms of the other and constitutes a virtual anti-class with respect to the other, and this, from overt ideological values all the way down to the most apparently non-political, 'merely' cultural features of everyday life." (47) We will see soon enough the degree to which both of these supplements to Marx's original statement are operative and problematic in the thought of violence within this worldwide class("less") system.

[23] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 65.

> the whole existence of the bourgeoisie and its culture is plunged into the most terrible crisis. On the one hand, we find the utter sterility of an ideology divorced from life, of a more or less conscious attempt at forgery. On the other hand, a cynicism no less terribly jejune lives on in the world-historical irrelevances and nullities of its own existence and concerns itself only with the defence of that existence and with its own naked self-interest. This ideological crisis is an unfailing sign of decay. The bourgeoisie has already been thrown on the defensive; however aggressive its *weapons* may be, it is fighting for self-preservation. *Its power to dominate has vanished beyond recall.*[25]

Read against the spatial, economic, and political crises of the late-1960s, the quite literal *decadence* that Lukács notes here is more than analogically apt: in fact, it marks another historical manifestation of a transhistorical and perpetual crisis, and one played out upon not only the bourgeois subject perpetually and always-already "thrown on the defensive," but also the very ideological structures and discursive means that inaugurate, sanctify, and sustain it, in a struggle that has less to do with any actuality of material conditions or ideological relations than their intrinsic non-correspondence, their historically-contingent points thereof, and the indissoluble tension introduced therein.

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A significant problem with Lukács' formulation, "then" and "now," is that it couches the notion of the fact of class struggle within an inherent revolutionality of the bourgeoisie, who, having "defeated feudalism" in "their revolution," are now faced with increasingly insufficient means (save for mendacious, self-preservative ideological promulgation) to resist a like maneuver directed against them: the bourgeoisie and capitalism constituting something of their own, if defensive, "revolution in permanence." While Lukács rightly notes that "the situation in which the bourgeoisie finds itself" – the late-capitalist situation included – "determines the function of its class consciousness in its struggle to achieve control of society,"[26] it is important to note, as Deleuze does in "On Capitalism and Desire," that even in the most reactive-revolutionary scenario, the bourgeoisie's struggle is not, and has never been, "its own." As he says,

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[24] These stratagems of defense and preservation – an actively mendacious consciousness, the reframing and recoding of material conditions and their concomitant inequities as manifest destiny, etc. – are certainly manifest in the context of the Vietnam era in the relativizing of human value and worth by economic contributions: the poor, *framed* as unable to contribute economically in ways other than transforming their bodies and lives into symbolic capital, were by this mendacious logic "doing the very best work for their country" as "true heroes," "the salt of the earth," or "the backbone of the nation," posited against the validational apologia for general bourgeois inaction and nonparticipation, "if I could, I would, but I have so much to do *here*." Post-Gulf War recruitment efforts – particularly "The Army of One" campaign – also speak to this, but from the end of legitimizing armed service in terms of bourgeois individualism, positing such service as a point of entry into active individuality, "being somebody": recasting the collective character of the armed forces, indissolubly tied to the collective character of the proletariat, from that frame of undifferentiatedness to a bourgeois-individualist frame whereby national service and determination is caulked onto self-determination and the perpetuation of the ideology of the individual at the level of the soldier as an operative agent integral to the enactment of colonizing/"liberating"/"democratizing" forces.

[25] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 67. Emphases his.

> (w)hen a social formation exhausts itself and begins to leak on every side, all sorts of things come uncoded, all sorts of unpoliced flows begin circulating ... The bourgeoisie imposes a new code, both economic and political, so you might think it was revolutionary. Not in the least. (...) The bourgeoisie never mistook its real enemy. Its real enemy was not the previous system, but that which had escaped the control of the previous system, and the bourgeoisie was resolved to control it in its turn. The bourgeoisie owed its power to the dissolution of the old system; but it could exercise this new power only by considering the other revolutionaries as its enemies. The bourgeoisie was never revolutionary. It had the revolution carried out for it. It manipulated, channeled, repressed an enormous surge of popular desire."[27]

Indeed, in saying that the bourgeois was (and constitutionally is) never revolutionary, but instead "had its revolution carried out for it," Deleuze maps back onto the category of the bourgeoisie the notion and relations of the service economy their emergence defines and deifies as a condition *of* their very emergence in the first place, indissolubly caulking consumer consciousness to class consciousness at the genetic, germinal level: a distancing from violence in its own way (hands clean of the labor and bloodshed of revolution, delegated to other forces) and the surrender to a political consciousness and activity now, in the Debordian "flow of images," carried out *before* it.

So, whereas Lukács notes a fundamentally revolutionary impulse in the very nature of the bourgeoisie that is deflected and reinflected in their self-directed and self-appointed false consciousness, Deleuze discounts the categorical propriety of any such impulse within the category of the bourgeoisie, locating it (and the conditions of any possible emergence of a true class consciousness) beyond the ideological/economic fissure upon which Lukács rests his observations, and instead within the axiomatics of contemporary capitalism itself, in the vicissitudes inherent in maintaining arrangements of power which, while they may entail and rely upon the bourgeois subject, are also always external to it. Here, Deleuze reframes the issue less as a structural-systemic inevitability (that is, as a play of false consciousness wherein the ideological superstructure occasionally becomes ruptured in its representational/reproductive capacities) than as an immanent anomaly of irrational systems: the free radicalization inherent in any totalizing system, given rise precisely by the totality of such a system, and to which – per Gödel's incompleteness theorem that any complex functional system can be either total or consistent, but never both – any system must give way.

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[26] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 65.
[27] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 268.

But the transformation from false to mendacious consciousness that Lukács notes can also be read along these very lines as a shift into the *perpetual autoproduction* of a certain consciousness, as opposed to the purely "false" or "tricked" consciousness that might be traditionally presupposed, with effects that are even more profound today. Indeed, a critical part of this mendacious consciousness is its ability to subsume even the image of the proletariat into itself, to appropriate and exploit it; hence, the bourgeoisie reads its own history as revolutionary, permits itself to think and see itself in its other, and its other in itself, and through this, though as an unintended effect, *initiates and accepts the conditions of its own proletarianization.* The desperate means and measures of bourgeois mendacious consciousness lead it to both confront and misapprehend what, increasingly in late capitalism, is at stake in its efforts to maintain its ideality: not the bourgeoisification of socioeconomic reality (the image of economic democracy, the "American Dream," etc.), but its proletarianization (manifest today in the antagonistic tension between the image of "ownership society" and the reality of debt society, the bourgeoisie as mortgagees[28]). In this, the mendacious character of this consciousness is all the more strongly pronounced, and with potentially disastrous ends: the bourgeoisie, *eternally fancying itself as revolutionary*, and now, in a more historically pronounced way, *objectively fancying itself as alienated, exploited, in decline and under threat*, may find succor for that fantasy within identifications *with* the oppressed or threatened, *with its other.*

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[28] In "Postscript on Control Societies" (in *Negotiations*), Deleuze notes this as a consequence – and one with consequences of its own – of the "essentially dispersive" character of a contemporary capitalism organized, in the First-World context, around "metaproduction" (as he says, "It no longer buys raw materials and no longer sells finished products: it buys finished products or assembles them from parts. What it seeks to sell is services, and what it seeks to buy, activities") wherein material production gives way to a pure sphere of exchange. In this, "(m)arketing is now the instrument of social control and produces the arrogant breed who are our masters. Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded, whereas discipline was long-term, infinite, and discontinuous. *A man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt.* One thing, it's true, hasn't changed – capitalism still keeps three quarters of humanity in extreme poverty, too poor to have debts and too numerous to be confined: control will have to deal not only with vanishing frontiers, but with mushrooming shantytowns and ghettos." (181; emphases mine)

In many ways, this does little to change the terms of its own self-image: here again, in the bourgeoisie mapping itself onto proletarian figures who themselves represent their own ideality – a phenomenon manifest in commercial cinema and daily life alike – a pronounced division of labor emerges, whereby proletarian bodies (in the labor economy, in war, in cinema, in whatever) are exploited and expended for an audience, already presupposed and positioned as bourgeois, which unproblematically consumes the product of their expenditure. But what is "produced" here is far more than the spectacular violence framed for distanced and inconsequential consumption on screen, the vicarious (if also inconsequential and incomplete) subversion of bourgeois morality through these anthropological specimens, or even the malefic *jouissance* (or better, a singularly sadomasochistic *schadenfreude*) in the schizophrenic tragicomedy of seeing the other that is the shell and kernel of bourgeois identity ultimately destroyed, a symbolic expunging of the other from within oneself, an exorcism of mislocated identification. More than even these, what is produced in these spectacular negations of class idealities and realities alike is precisely a reaffirmation of the hard-won status of the bourgeoisie, of the lengths to which its other will go to achieve and usurp that status, and consequently of the enduring, compelling good that it represents.

And if we follow Deleuze's notion of an axiomatic capitalist structure, one that finds itself intrinsically and immanently compelled to always come up against its own material and conceptual limits and thus conceive of strategies for their overcoming, we can also note not simply a totalitarian and totalizing face of the capitalist-spectacular system working to create and maintain a plane of absolute consistency which favors and fosters the (political) image and (economic) actuality of the bourgeois subject, but also – though not instead, in an ideological *coup de force – a permanent state of crisis carried alongside and maintained within its own permanent states of exception and exceptionability*, against which Debord's proclamation that "(t)he triumph of an economic system founded on separation leads to the *proletarianization of the* *world*'[29] rings all the more true. A double-movement is involved in the contemporary bourgeoisification of mass consciousness, necessarily entailing as its coordinate maneuver the *active proletarianization of that same consciousness* – a process by which class, as a general category meaningfully present to *all* thought, indeed present to thought *at all*, *for all*, may be categorically dissolved.

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At this point, two critical objections might be raised: first, that the notion of a wholesale dissolution of class consciousness is too sweeping, positing an impossible totality of relations and effects, and second, that even if the former bears out in specific, material senses (say, the primacy of the "consumer," a singularity from which none today can ultimately escape), what is in fact at stake in late capitalism is a crystalline overdetermination of the thought of class, predicated precisely on conditions which facilitate the subject's ability to occupy any number of class positions, processes, and identities. These concerns are neither unrelated nor dismissible; indeed, they constitute precisely the constitutional crisis of the contemporary bourgeois subject and the fundamental terms of its "correction": a dialectic between discursive forces and material conditions that, in the late-capitalist turn, refracts the historical crisis of the bourgeois subject it in such a way as to reflect and return it to its conceptual origins.

To be sure, in positing the idea of such a totality of bourgeois consciousness, we must be cautious: first because such an idea is itself problematically tied to a characteristically bourgeois-objectifying position (a political-philosophical problem), and second because such a totality (if not an actuality, then an ideality toward which multiple discursive forces inexorably tend) is one that itself, and especially in the dispersed and schizophrenic conditions of late capitalism, is irreducibly heterogeneic in constitution and function. Indeed, as Jameson observes in his reading of Lukács in *Marxism and Form*, the idea of totality as an objective category itself is the linchpin of a bourgeois philosophy, or at least a philosophy that implicitly valorizes a certain bourgeois perspective, insofar as the basic category of any given totality – aesthetic, cultural, economic – requires as its fundament an ipseically objectivizing and abstracting perspective that, in its unwillingness to confront questions of social reality (and particularly as regards those realities of class and relations of production, in all of their complex and mutual overdetermination), is bourgeois by default. And indeed the same might be noted of the tendency, in cinematic production and criticism alike, to proceed with reading our cinematic texts in terms of "typical" figurations, inasmuch as for Jameson and Lukács

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[29] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 21.

> this category has been mishandled in the vulgar Marxist practice of reducing characters to mere allegories of social forces, of turning 'typical' characters into mere symbols of class, such as the petit bourgeoisie, the counterrevolutionary, the landed nobleman, the Utopian socialist intellectual, and so forth. Sartre has pointed out that such categories are themselves idealistic, in that they presuppose immutable forms, eternal Platonic ideas, of the various social classes: what they leave out is precisely history itself, and the notion of the unique historical situation, to which Lukács himself has always been faithful in his criticism."[30]

So to remain true to the spirit (if not the letter) of Lukács in advancing these arguments, we might first acknowledge Jameson's methodology and arguments in "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture," where, following the Marxian dictum that "consciousness is determined by social being,"[31] Jameson argues that any meaningful concretization of class consciousness is completely dependent on the given historical situation and the conditions of possibility it presents. For Jameson, this emerges in the form of cognitive mapping, a figural/allegorical apprehension of social relations that nonetheless requires as its spur the element of real, experienced relations. As this relates to the thought of class (which, from a Marxian perspective, problematically *demands* figuration), he explains that

> (i)n the present context, the 'thought' towards which reality strives is not only or even not yet class consciousness: it is rather the very preconditions for such class consciousness in social reality itself, that is to say, the requirement that, for people to become aware of the class, the classes be already in some sense perceptible as such. This fundamental requirement we will call, now borrowing a term from Freud rather than from Marx, the requirement of *figurability*, the need for social reality and everyday life to have developed to the point at which its underlying class structure becomes *representable* in tangible form. (...) The relationship between class consciousness and figurability, in other words, demands something more basic than abstract knowledge, and implies a mode of experience that is more visceral and existential than the abstract certainties of economics and Marxian social science... (...) To become figurable – that is to say, visible in the first place, accessible to our imaginations – the classes have to be able to become in some sense characters in their own right..."[32]

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[30] Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 193.

[31] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 51.

[32] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 37-38.

It is from such a perspective that Jameson reads Lumet's emblematically "apolitically political" *Dog Day Afternoon* as encompassing two seemingly incommensurate but, we can hopefully now recognize, fully complementary narrative experiences: one tracing the figurability of class and allegorizing the crisis of late-capitalism's proletarianizing force, and the other, more accessible and tendentially subsuming the former's revelatory capacities, attending the bourgeois "existential paradigm" proper to its moment, "the anti-hero of the sad sack … and a kind of self-pitying vision of alienation … frustration, and above all – yesterday's all-American concept – the 'inability to communicate.'"[33] Inexorably in this process, history again becomes myth, historical consciousness is sublated into paradigms of eternal struggles and returns, and the proletarianized consciousness of the neo-bourgeoisie is fundamentally accommodated to its inaugural anxieties, depoliticized, depotentialized, and dehistoricized as a consequence of both the narratological/allegorical formations and what Jameson calls the "aesthetic of representation" related to the totalizing unity of form and content in commercial cinema: "The camera," he says, "is the absolute presence and absolute truth: thus, the aesthetic of representation collapses the density of the historical event, and flattens it back out into fiction."[34]

On the face of things, the concerted critique of middle-class life so central to the cinema of this era, and especially when coupled with the preponderance of differing social and class positions in its protagonists, presents another significant barrier to the claim that the primary appeal is to a specifically bourgeois consciousness, and certainly in the coextensive notion that this latter, as an unproblematically uniform singularity, may invite a uniform and unproblematized identification from an infinitely heterogeneous audience. Certainly, we might argue that, as a first and final condition, *every* figure the cinema presents individually (that is, as an individual, characterized as such by name, role, or action) is by default bourgeois, and particularly by the latter's thought of the proletariat: imaginable only in its collectivity, its lack of individuality and hence its lack of individual agency, the proletariat is a *typical* category, as opposed to the *characters* which, by their charactericity alone, provide sufficiently individuated inroads for bourgeois identification.

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[33] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 41-42.

[34] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 41.

As Darko Suvin explains, "(a) character can only be understood in dialectical interrelationship with historical concepts and categories of *types*, which shape the norms of verisimilitude shared by the author and his/her social addressee."[35] Moreover, Suvin's sense of "character" – that is, narrative agents with "conflicting and sufficiently numerous traits[36] which provide a semblance in representation of a "real person" contending with specific, discrete, and recognizable sociohistorical relations, as opposed to (but always in relation to and informed by) condensational, transhistorical and transpositional "types," as to be found in Aristotelian-Proppian (and, for Jameson, vulgar-Marxian) narrative theory and practice – comes to bear as equally on a transhistorically understood modality of bourgeois consciousness, in the forms of individuation and propriety. He notes,

> (c)haracter in the individualist sense was born together with the bourgeoisie, capitalist money economy, economic rationality, atomization, quantification, and reification of human relationships, including equality before the law, and the whole well-known historical cluster accompanying the rise of this new episteme. Character is the fictional equivalent of private property in the process of production and circulation, of independent individuals in the market 'who are the possessors of commodities [and who] place themselves in relation to one another as persons whose will resides in these objects.'[37]

It is in this way that the fundamental disconnect between economic reality and ideological ideality that Lukács identifies becomes particularly useful in its own right: in the ipseically accommodatory "flattening of the historical" that Jameson isolates in contemporary cinema, and moreover in the processes of characterization that move, if even slightly, beyond mere figural typification, even nominally proletarian figures, as characters, invite bourgeois identification despite the signifiers of socioeconomic reality that define them by way of occupation, appearance, or demeanor. At the same time, their separation from the social collective at once defuses their individual power (even *Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle can be understood not as the face of the collective proletariat, but as an aberrance, and one moreover also compelled by bourgeois ideals which he desires but does not understand, like an alien or cyborg), while simultaneously transferentially creating a model in which the *disempowerment* of the bourgeoisie (as defined and active individual agents) is likewise posited as a current yet transhistorical problematic, but in the end – and particularly insofar as the spectator's "will resides in these objects" – one to be resolved within the all-encompassing sphere of representational mediation alone.

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[35] Suvin, "Can People Be (Re)Presented in Fiction?: Toward a Theory of Narrative Agents and a Materialist Critique beyond Technocracy and Reductionism," 686. Emphases mine.

[36] Suvin, "Can People Be (Re)Presented in Fiction?: Toward a Theory of Narrative Agents and a Materialist Critique beyond Technocracy and Reductionism," 686.

[37] Suvin, "Can People Be (Re)Presented in Fiction?: Toward a Theory of Narrative Agents and a Materialist Critique beyond Technocracy and Reductionism," 686. Brackets his. Citation from Marx, *Capital, vol. 1* (New York: Vintage 1977), 178.

The sheer multiplicity of identificatory positions actualized by (and, from the side of the audience, indeed demanded of) this cinema opens up on an almost infinitely-variable field of potential compacts, recognitions, and revelations which, perhaps ironically enough but not coincidentally, is also present and accounted for within the very parameters of class consciousness that capitalism enables. The complexity of overdetermination in the idea of class is expounded by Jack Amariglio, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff in "Class, Power, and Culture," where the authors argue that while we can recognize singular and totalizing tendencies in contemporary discourse in support of the image of the dominant mode of production, any such tendencies must and do rely upon often-contradictory appeals, positionings, and registers of identification. Vis-à-vis the conceptual and material overdeterminations of class, Amariglio, Resnick, and Wolff argue that contemporary processes of identification and subjectification not only entail and permit the occupation of multiple (and often contradictory) class and non-class identities, but fundamentally *demand* it.

For the authors, class is irreducible to terms of a defined individual or collective identification (*the* proletariat, *the* bourgeoisie) based solely upon one's relation to the performance/production or appropriation/exploitation of surplus labor: these class *processes* are distinct from class *positions*, and should be considered as such, actualizing themselves in the spheres of social activity and formations. "Class processes," the authors note, "are the specific social processes that involve the performance/appropriation and distribution of surplus labor. The definition does not define any *particular* form of performance/appropriation or distribution."[38] These processes, moreover, may be understood as fundamental or subsumed, with the former informed and identified with the dominant mode of production, and the latter of a piece with the hegemonic operational modality of that base. As they explain,

> (w)e differentiate between fundamental class processes (the performance/extraction of surplus labor) and subsumed class processes (the process within which already

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[38] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 490.

> appropriated surplus labor is distributed to agents). There are different kinds of fundamental class processes (e.g., communal, feudal, capitalist, slave), since there are distinct forms in which surplus labor may be performed/appropriated in a social formation. In addition, each of these fundamental class processes has its subsumed class process. While any concrete social formation may involve different fundamental and subsumed class processes, there is usually one prevalent mode of the fundamental class process.[39]

In other, perhaps simpler terms, the former is understood as the prevalent organization of labor and its exchange, and the latter, while not a purely "superstructural" effect arising from and maintained in the direct domination of the agents participating in it, is how these fundamental processes play out in material and conceptual relations: how class is thought, and how that thought informs the totality of intersubjective/interagential relations. Insofar as in social formations, past and present, such positions and relations are multifaceted, highly intertwined and interaffective, and ultimately immanent to their specific historical-material conditions, no overarching claim may be made to the absolute unity or contiguity of such processes within or across specific organizations. However, in the case of multinational corporate capitalism, the authors are keen to note that "the direction and control of any fundamental class process may not be in the hands of the agents of that process" – that is, directly within the hands of the actual consumer (or in late capitalism, investor-debtor) class, those that "in fact" hold a position of economic hegemony within the dominant fundamental class process – "but may reside instead with occupants of particular subsumed class position."[40]

These class *positions* are to be understood as the multiple fields in which one may be situated by the always-shifting intersections and overlaps inherent in these processes: these positions

> are not comprised of permanent residents of singular class positions who represent some permanent class status in and through their every gesture. Class position does not refer to always already constituted class agents. Rather, agents participate and are located in class processes in contradictory ways; they may hold numerous class positions, requiring different and perhaps clashing subjective identities.[41]

In regard to Lukács understanding of the eternality of the class struggle vis-à-vis the perpetual crisis of the bourgeoisie, we can perhaps better understand its complexities in the authors' terms: the only true notion of class is that which arises when, in the inevitable "struggle to reproduce or transform the capitalist fundamental and subsumed class processes,"[42] specific but always provisional alliances are forced to be forged. In other words – and in ways that we can understand as informed by that irreducible gap and non-correspondence between ideology and economic base which Lukács has identified as the constituent condition from which bourgeois consciousness arises – class can only concretize as a concept of collectivity in such moments of contestation, but is always also dependent on a class identity that is more fluid than determinate, influenced in equal measure by actual socioeconomic conditions and positions as by the multiple positions in which the aforementioned processes – fundamental and subsumed class processes, always in relation to variegated social, cultural, and discursive processes – operate and intersect at the level of the individual agent.

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[39] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 490.

[40] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 490-491.

[41] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 491.

Class *identity*, then, "is the 'understanding' agents have of themselves that enables them to participate in *class* processes and, therefore, to occupy particular *class* positions."[43] This understanding arises from, and is reciprocally constituted by, these participations and occupations, and is determined to the degree that it is a constitutive form of social subjectivation in the Foucauldian sense (that is, a heterogeneous and continuous process rather than a matter of factory-style templating and molding), which is understood by the authors "as a subset of cultural processes that constitute agents as *self*-defined and *self*-conscious in relation to 'others.'"[44] Within this framework, and consequently within consciousness, "(a)gents are 'subjectified' in ways that make it possible for them to occupy numerous, contradictory class positions."[45]

Thus, while the interplay between processes, positions, and identities works to destabilize and keeps fluid the "field" of class (in such a way, it should be noted, that also works very much *against* the potential for stability of such identities that could lead to instances of profound and transformative collective struggle), these all also operate under a generally dominant paradigm – here, the diffuse and diffusing spectre of corporate capitalism – which does not determine them directly but nonetheless sets the terms and parameters within which such processes, positions, and identities can be constituted and set in motion. While, on the one hand, class as a categorical (and by this political) concept has been diffused under our prevailing mode of production and its mode of existence, on the other hand, by dint of certain and determinate interests of the capitalist organon, these diffusions are not absolute or complete in ways that necessarily entail a strict class stratification or its radical undoing: that is, there is little to no "purely free play" here, nor strictly speaking a radical potentiality for revolutionary change; in the end,

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[42] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 491.

[43] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 491.

[44] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 491. Emphases theirs.

[45] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 491.

> (t)he reproduction or transformation of determinate class processes partly depends on the capacity of class 'subjects' to either carry out or subvert the procedures and strategies that comprise the processes. This capacity is not guaranteed by or secured within class processes themselves, nor is it attributable to a reflexive 'ideology' that merely mirrors the 'objective' class positions. The cultural processes that 'subjectify' agents do not uniformly stamp agents with the capacity for *either* subjection or insubordination. They help to produce, in the same set of agents, varying capacities to be subjected and 'revolutionized' within different class processes or even within the same class process.[46]

So while the overdetermined and overdetermining conditions delineated by Amariglio, Resnick, and Wolff certainly create a variegated subjective field – not entirely unlike that proposed by Benveniste, and certainly not unlike that given shape in the cinematic-spectatorial encounter – in which a great deal *may* occur at the level of consciousness (the subject/agent *may* find its place within a dominant collective class identity, the conditions themselves *may* be brought to light and thought in a way that *may* awaken a critical agency or revolutionary consciousness), they also provide the very conditions for the *simultaneous exclusion* of the thought of class as a key and operative determinant in social reality, decentering and depoliticizing that consciousness by means of dispersal and dissolution (when one can be in and of all social strata, but at home and in the company of none at a collective level, class consciousness evaporates, dissipates, like a puff of smoke), and all the moreso when we take into consideration the primary condition of the encounter with the cinematic text, always framing what it presents for objective apprehension (a tendentially objectivizing-consumptive, and hence bourgeois, frame of engagement). And here, the distinction between potentiality and permissibility – the gulf between them, the crisis of politics itself – is most pronounced.

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[46] Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture," 491-492.

Thus we might say, as a supplement to and extension of what Silverman identifies in suture as a general dialectic of plenitude and lack which constitutes the alienated-desiring subject – or, in Jonathan L. Beller's remarkable materialist formulation of that subject, the "worker-spectator" that is the "dialectical counterpart to the image-commodity"[47] – that the very same ratiocination works here to the end of maintaining the bourgeois subject specifically proper to late capitalism: lacking, fearful of loss, spoken by and dependent on its other, and in infinite debt with only spurious affirmational rewards. Like the ultimate settlement on the image of a provisional plenitude, the conditions of what might be called the proletariat position are suppressed and superseded by the ostensible rewards and promises in line with those of the bourgeois position, but always also provisionally and tenuously. And this provisionality, of course, is absolutely crucial: this state of permanent crisis for and, categorically, *of* the bourgeois subject is *not* categorically outside the boundaries of systemic maintenance, nor without political or productive value. Apropos of the modes of operational-subjectivizing violence structuring modern control society, fear and anxiety displace one set of complacencies and replace them with another, increase competitive drives to maintain status, and, more than merely encouraging or facilitating antagonisms, *demand* the continuing antipathy to and, yes, violence against those others that might threaten the favorite sons of a system that too uses them as engineered pawns, like stem cells or drones, as means to alienated and alienating ends.

So in the end, while we might productively note something of a fissure, a chink in the inassailable imaginary armor of bourgeois sovereign right which shields its identified subjects from the thought of their (and its own) integral complicity in the nexus of class and violence, throwing that subject's very place, privilege, sanctity and power into stark relief and hence "into the most terrible crisis," those very axioms and axiomatic processes that necessitated this crisis to begin with have already (if not always-already) for the greatest part reincorporated these weaknesses and transmuted them into spectacular strength. Because the thought (and, if in certain different senses, the reality) of class and violence are so inextricably intertwined, and because the sustained thought of either cannot be abided lest their respective imaginaries – their very means of meaning – collapse, the thought of both, in tandem, must be obsessively reattended – though, as Agamben has noted so well in the epigraph above, decidedly *not* to the end of a utopian equalization and stabilization (in its place: the spurious image of the classless society, the appropriation and parodization of an indefensible, ultimately defeated, and presumed-to-be-dead socioeconomic and philosophical order). And despite the many signs to the contrary in what could be seen as its most radicalized moment, the primary site within which this derevolution was carried out – indeed, perhaps the only site where it *could* have been carried out – was within the very commercial cinema that, against these crises, had once again come to cause such substantive concern.

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[47] Beller, "Capital/Cinema," 93 n.4.

ORDER OUT OF CHAOS:
RESURRECTING, REINFLECTING, AND RE-PRODUCING THE IMAGE OF THE BOURGEOISIE
(METAGENERIC PRINCIPLES OF CLASS, CONSPIRACY, AND CONSUMPTION)

> *The member of a given class therefore defends not so much his own individual existence and privileges, as the very preconditions of those privileges in general: and in the realm of thought also he is willing to venture only to the point at which those preconditions begin to be called into question. We may therefore in a more abstract way say that the influence of class consciousness on thought is felt not so much in the perception of the individual details of reality as in the overall form or Gestalt according to which those details are organized and interpreted.*[48]
>
> Fredric Jameson
> *Marxism and Form*

> *"The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight." Walter Benjamin's diagnosis, which by now is more than fifty years old, has lost none of its relevance. And that is so not really or not only because power no longer has today any form of legitimization other than emergency, and because power everywhere and continuously refers and appeals to emergency as well as laboring to secretly produce it. (...) This is the case also and above all because naked life, which was the hidden foundation of sovereignty, has meanwhile become the dominant form of life everywhere.*[49]
>
> Giorgio Agamben
> "Form-Of-Life"

> *Furor arma ministrat.*[50]
>
> Virgil
> *Aenid I*, 150

Once and again, it would seem to be within the image, which in late capitalism is for Debord that most pronounced point of identity between economics and ideology, that these most profound crises can be directly mediated without direct engagement or culpability, in the apocryphal space of a collectively maintained and authorless fiction that, by nature, is inherently deniable. But if the Sisyphean task of correcting this decline seems to be firmly and solely in the terrain of the ideological it is in a very specific sense thereof, one that moves beyond the strictures of a mere false or even blindly mendacious consciousness, a reactive and reproductive play of "smoke and mirrors" that serves merely as an idling distraction from any popular leanings toward revolution in thought or action, one that is understood, and indeed operates, as an active, productive force.

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[48] Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 184.

[49] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 6. His citation of Benjamin is from "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 257.

[50] "Anger supplies the arms."

In its forms and figures, and even in the superimposition of class identifications, the cinema operates in a productively metonymic reciprocality with both the ideal-image of the bourgeoisie and its subsumed proletarian consciousness. The previously noted paradoxes are sufficiently resolved in this state of mutual affinity, and all the moreso by replicating and reframing the real and perceived crises of that subject's/consciousness' relation to violence, a relation now problematized and decentered in the generalized movement toward class consciouslessness: in other words, while not ignoring but directly attending to this crisis, by falling back on convention, (re)creating spaces in which violence can be contained safely but not absolutely, working both through and with this perpetual crisis by reframing it in terms that can be symbolically solved in comfortable but never complete ways, and by this re-producing the bourgeois subject as both a universalized and stabilized identity *and* the nexus of a defensive and self-preservative contestation in permanence.

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Certainly, the cinema has always in some way attended and catered to a certain, if rudimentary, kind of bourgeois consciousness. Indeed, even the medium's earliest attempts at capturing social reality have demonstrated this tendency, focusing on categories of reality "proper to" proletarian experience from a characteristically bourgeois objective-observatory perspective and thereby framing them for the same. This tendency is present even in texts as pedestrianly proto-documentarian as the Lumières' *Workers Leaving the Factory* and *Carmeaux: Drawing Out the Coke*, where we can witness an almost anthropological *enregistrement*, framed within the context of paid and projected entertainment, of the factory or mine worker: an act of scenarization which (by way of Kracauer) not only points to something of a revelation of these social realities, but also to a very specific subject whose normalized perspective actively excludes them. Among these relatively banal scenarizations of everyday banalities, the presumption and privileging of bourgeois perspectivity, and even bourgeois figures, emerges in other, equally small ways: either specifically, as in the businessmen enjoying a streetside shave in Edison's 1894 *The Barber Shop* (with the barber and his labor relegated to the secondary focus of action, as the purchasing force in the service economy literally and figuratively take the foreground, holding a jolly, silent exchange operating independently of the service-provider who is invisible to their experience of consumption), or more generally, in the presupposed but unseen spectator before *any* scene cinematically staged and presented.

In all cases, the de facto point of engagement and identification is *forcibly* bourgeois, with even the proletarian-identified viewer expected to not only apprehend his/her position from a bourgeois point of view (that is, an alienating redoubling and redirection of the mode of proletarian consciousness noted by Lukács), but also to consume him/herself as an objective image (a full and inescapable habitation of the objective frame of bourgeois perspectivity). And while it is certainly conceivable and plausible that, in the mode of Kracauer, one *could* (and, given the demography of the earliest audiences, may very well have) read the texts noted above as containing in their purview a certain affinity toward revealing the subjugated status of the urban proletariat, and even potentially providing a rallying point around which those conditions might be brought to an objective, dis-alienating light, contemporary commercial cinema works to absent even this potentiality from its textual field, and even, especially, in and by focusing on such figures, spaces, and conditions, paying them a certain degree of heed in order to resituate their function.

Hollywood cinema's enduring and implicit role in the general "bourgeoisification" of social consciousness reaches entirely new plateaus in its post-67 era, contributing to a wholesale if spurious *(re-)bourgeoisification of mass consciousness*, working *tout court* toward the elimination of any *meaningful* demarcation of relative or differential appeal to, or identificatory value for, specific modalities of class consciousness. This movement toward the constitution of the "universal bourgeois subject" is ingrained to such a degree that even the marked celebration of underclass outlaw figures in Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) bears the traces of these tendencies. Arguably, Penn's film was most controversial not for its graphic and spectacular violence, but rather for framing it within a narratology that actively and integrally (and in this, potentially disastrously) acknowledges the perpetuity of class struggle and the centrifugal dissymmetries in the distribution of wealth brought on by late capitalism's characteristically pronounced expansions and centralizations. To an extent, the film *can* be read as something of a sign of, and even call to, a proletarian-revolutionary consciousness, celebrating the power and potentiality of the economically disadvantaged to right the unequal distribution of wealth, and moreover to a resistance, however anachronistically rendered, to the emergent forces of corporatization and the general proletarianization which follows from centralization of wealth, power, and resources to which they tend.

Such sentiments are particularly evident in the conclusion of an early scene, in which Clyde, in a gesture of mercy to the struggling, soon-to-be-evicted farmer "Otis Harris" (an uncredited actor, the very typical-image of the Midwestern agrarian: rotund, unkempt, in overalls and a frayed straw hat), his family (the archetypal wife and two children, grubby but beautiful), and his sharecropper farmhand (a black man, also uncredited, named simply, singly, "Davis"), on whose property he and Bonnie have trespassed, initially takes aim but leaves them all alive. Instead, and with a knowing smirk, Clyde shoots through the almost-comically oversized notice of foreclosure posted by the "Midlothian Citizens Bank" in front of the dilapidated homestead; he then hands the gun to Harris, who follows suit, and who then encourages Davis (who silently waits for his master's approval with obscenely exaggerated deference) to do the same: each and all "brothers in arms." That this sequence, and especially in its resolution, is (as it certainly was designed to be) a *universally* "crowd-pleasing" moment is telling: pointing to both a general discomfiture with emergent anonymous forces of corporatization – "the bank," as later with "the law"[51] – which we might identify (as Jameson does) as a precondition for the sustained reflection on social reality demanded by a Marxian consciousness, and also to that contradictory movement in the schizoid self-image of the bourgeoisie as being both the put-upon *and* the agent of correction, a simultaneity of identifications with class processes and positions that ultimately cancels out the potential for a politically meaningful mobilization or recognition of, much less direct identification with, a true "proletarian consciousness" in the sense that Lukács and Jameson have described.

But this sequence, and indeed the film in its entirety, only superficially speaks to a mass discomfiture with the expanding transformational economic realities and inequities of the late capitalist mode of production, and even less so to a true consciousness of its effects (namely, class restratification). The outward signifiers ultimately ring hollow, and constitute a simulation of the political every bit as potent and unconsciously entrenched as the protagonists' simulation of outlaw-proletariat revolution. Far from completely disconnecting or disengaging itself from the audience's *Gestalt* sensibilities, it addresses them directly, but ultimately – even inevitably, *necessarily* – in bad faith: "Where prudence suggests a turn away from the concrete view of the social – real content – which is always bound up with the protopolitical," Jameson says, "at that point other forms of pseudocontent have to take its place. *The work still has to pretend to be about something.*"[52] In this way, the film's allegorically pungent late-Depression-era-cum-collapsed-frontier setting works to situate this story's thematic content in a marked (if, as is evident in the scene discussed above, somewhat clumsily overdetermined and reductive) analogical parallel to the Vietnam era's socioeconomic decadence at the same time as it fully dehistoricizes the totality of the narrative – which in so many ways has *everything* to do with anxieties of corporatization and its consequent foreclosure of economic liberalism in the calcification of capital-circulation circuits – and in so doing mythologizes the class struggle in such a way that defuses and diffuses its immediate political urgency, removes it from its historical-immanent conditions, and, ultimately, legitimates that struggle on the side of the bourgeoisie: in the end, Bonnie and Clyde are failed venture capitalists, dogged individualists whose dual sites of contestation are against falling again into nameless proletariat obscurity and warding off the press of totalitarian state forces who would seek to subjugate them.

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[51] The banks, like the local police forces, are interchangeable and faceless: an image of dispersed power in late capitalism. At the same time, by giving *something* of face and form to "the state" as a repressive and multi-layered bureaucratized force (the bank, the police, the Law-qua-FBI agent), a nostalgicist impulse is fulfilled in this movement toward late capitalism's more diffuse "stateless society," providing yet another false front for the faux-revolutionary impulse to rail against, to no effect or end.

The potential for a "non-bourgeois" identification is also deflected, and far more substantively, in terms of the nominally proletarian figures that inhabit the above sequence and populate the film. While again being cautious of those "vulgar-Marxist tendencies" that Jameson has noted, it is certainly, unambiguously the case that, in the sequence discussed above, Bonnie, Clyde, and even the farmer, beyond being individuated and to varying degrees beatified,[53] all have unambiguously bourgeois aspirations despite (or more precisely, as a condition of) their likewise unambiguous underclass positioning: the farmer in his thwarted dream to be successful in his independently-owned and -operated agrarian enterprise and in the rebuilding of the Post-Depression ascension of the free market, and Bonnie and Clyde in using the stolen corporate monies to achieve a standard of living they could never legitimately attain in prevailing social reality, a standard informed by a glamorized magazine and movie imaginary to which they aspire,[54] but for which, as *tourists* and *pretenders*, they ultimately (and spectacularly) pay a terrible, *but justifiable*, price.

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[52] Jameson, "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity," *The Cultural Turn*, 133-134. Emphases mine, and particularly to highlight that the film-text itself possesses a mendacious quality as well, its own spurious engagements masking (or belying) a more active politics of disavowal. Interestingly, what is perhaps the film's most direct allusion to the "war at home" is in the image of C.W. Moss wearing a gas mask while discussing his newest tattoo (an image which calls back to mind his *other* tattoo, from military service). In a sense, it is an encapsulating (if schizophrenic and confounded) image which brings together connotations of state force, military service, and proletarianization – but is also an image that is never really explained (why he wears the mask, even where it came from, are unaddressed) and as such is only an incidental, passing, but nonetheless *ineffably arresting* detail: in this, a kind of metaphor for the film's degree of engagement with the social reality of its audience.

And it is in this last, their status as mere tourists in a bourgeois territory to which they can never be fully assimilated (despite their best efforts and appearances), that the film deals its most affirmative coup de grace. On the one hand, Bonnie and Clyde replicate the structure of entrepreneurial capitalist culture at every turn, from defining and introducing themselves as professionals ("Bonnie and Clyde: we're bank robbers!") to conscripting and exploiting supplemental labor in their ventures. This last is most apparent in their meeting of (poorly-spoken, burping, unwashed lumpenprole) mechanic C.W. Moss (Michael J. Pollard), who repairs their car and joins them as their driver: Bonnie compliments him by noting his expertise ("You're a smart fella; you sure do know a lot about automobiles, don't you?"), which to a degree, at least for the audience, elevates him as a character. But at the same time, the *beau geste* in her appraisal of his unrecognized value is less to sympathetically acknowledge his socioeconomic subordination, or even to invite him into their like-identified company, than to lure him into service as their valet: seducing him not with flirtation or sexual promise but with the prospect that he, too, can join the ranks of the successful (her finishing touch in this interview/sales pitch is to refer to him in elevated professional-individuated terms – "*Mr.* C.W. Moss," as opposed to their previous patronization "boy" – while, in the conclusion of this sequence, he happily rides in the trunk, like a good "boy," as they drive off). And finally, the explicit framing of their exploits as a something of a vacation, a road trip through provincial and urban spaces replete with points of destination, hotel stays, and even "setting up house" in various locations, is a generalized expression of their desire to enter the privileged ranks of the middle class.

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[53] Certainly, the presence and function of the star system itself is operative here in precisely the same way as Jameson recognizes in *Dog Day Afternoon.* But this film takes the principle even further (no doubt as part of its naked appeal to the era's youth culture) in the titular characters' appearance, the natty 60s-chic of their attire, and particularly in the stark beauty Dunaway and Beatty themselves (the historical figures they represent here were, it must be remembered, positively troglodytic: a fact the film actively avoids acknowledging by presenting introductory "historical" photographs not of the real Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, but instead of Dunaway and Beatty). This overdetermined idealization, of course, all the more invites and facilitates identification with (and even the glorification of) their characters, all the more marks them as distinct from the lumpen figures with whom they identify and keep company, and has in fact established something of a standard trope – the "dirty pretty violent prole" – that we now see in any film of its ilk (*Boxcar Bertha*, *Badlands*, *Days of Heaven*, *True Romance*, *Thelma and Louise*, Natural *Born Killers*, *Pulp Fiction*, etc.).

[54] Beyond their oft-reiterated interest in their representation and growing mythic infamy, Bonnie and Clyde's relation to media, image, and simulation is a critical trope within the film: after their first robbery, for example, they (anachronistically) attend a screening of Mervyn LeRoy's *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933) which, in its signature production of "We're in the Money," its speaks to (and for) them with only the most ipseic and superficial specificity. That *Gold Diggers'* success (along with *42nd Street* and *Footlight Parade*) was such that it essentially saved Warner Bros. – the studio that released *Bonnie and Clyde* as well – from Depression-era bankruptcy is just one of the film's snarky, but significant, intertextual moments. As Ray observes, the film is buttressed by a surfeit of intertextual signifiers, as much "for them" (Clyde's eyepatch recalling Michel's glasses in *Breathless*, and from this recalling the latter's own fascination with emulating cinematic archetypes such as Bogart) as for the audience (the multiple stylistic quotes, including the aforementioned film but also extending to Eisenstein's Odessa Steps sequence). These intertextual cues also contribute to the narrative's dehistoricizing thrust, comprising an encapsulated "film universe" of narratological, figurative, and formal archetypes which lend the film as such a quality specifically amenable to contemporary consumer consciousness (cf. Umberto Eco, "Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," in *Travels in Hyperreality*, especially pp. 208-211).

But on the other hand, in this persistent trope of tourism – from the motel well-marked as a "Tourist Court" to their episodic ingratiation into and habitation of bourgeois homes – coupled with their persistent eviction from those occupied spaces by the law, makes it abundantly clear that such a status must and can only be earned by *legitimate* means, and the film thereby becomes a pernicious cautionary tale: these are outsiders and invaders who, for all their aspirations and machinations, are not even petty bourgeoisie, merely petty thieves who, taking advantage of the inherent good faith of the *legitimate* bourgeoisie, invade and corrupt a space that, while it may have opened its doors to them, was never meant to be theirs. In this, it is also worth noting the obverse character of their bourgeois hostage-compatriots: they, too, are tourists, sojourners in a sphere of violence normally inaccessible and undesirable, along for the ride, immersed in the thrill of subverting the law without ever actively partaking or participating in it, but still subject to the consequences of punishment, up to and including death, for their passive complicity.

So even in this somewhat radicalized (but not politically radicaliz*ing*) commercial text, and crucially given its moment of emergence and ensuing popularity and revenues, we can witness the manifestation of the double-movement that constitutes the crisis of class consciousness in late-capitalist America, two trajectories moving to join at a single, singular nexus: the recognition of the social realities of class separations, imaginarily reconfigured to validate their misrecognition, a validation which not only reconstitutes the image of bourgeois sovereignty, but ultimately of the hegemonic majority-position of that consciousness *as* social reality, legitimated as a *neutral* reality. Relatively disengaged from (or confounded as/within) the outward signifiers of the "bourgeoisie," of any meaningful class identification whatsoever, such an image is able to operate in a fully generalized, and fully depoliticized, guise.

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But at the same time, to the ends of maintaining the bourgeois subject in and as the nexus of a permanent *contestatory* crisis, a simple affirmation of its hegemony (or, in the case of *Bonnie and Clyde*, in positing the ideality of its interests across class lines, even as a motivation and point of empathic legitimization for the subversion of the law to achieve them) is not enough. In contemporary commercial cinema we often see these figurations and separations, with all their attendant characterizations and identifications, most transparently rendered as a *conspiratorial* problematic: beset on all sides by competing and contestatory interests, violence always looms and comes to threaten the bourgeois subject, from both below (the criminal, the pre- or anti-capitalist foreign threat, the terrorist) *and* above (the corporate entity, the corrupt CEO, even the structure of governmental power and law itself).

In "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture," Jameson delineates the era's triadic rearticulation of class and power relations: first, "that newly atomized petty bourgeoisie of the cities" who articulate the "'proletarianization' and marginalization" of the middle class; second, in the "impotent power structures of the local neighborhoods, which represent something like the national bourgeoisies of the Third World, colonized and gutted of their older content," a spatio-sovereign problematic of bourgeois space infiltrated and in decline; and third, "that multinational capitalism into which the older ruling classes of our world have evolved," posing a final coordinate by which the bourgeoisie is both materially and self-consciously disempowered, its ownmost means of social control – economic mastery – divested, usurped.[55] This is crucial, because it poses the question (and consciousness) of the classical bourgeois/proletariat relation as insignificant in the face of the real and perceived effects of corporate hegemony. In short, from the perspective of the disempowered and proletarianized bourgeois subject, class again becomes of the highest consequence: it matters to the extent that the older econo-political categories of "bourgeois" and "proletariat," dissolved and indistinct by the forces of multinational capitalism, remain necessary to the relational self-identity of the middle class, and all the more so the extent that the pressures applied "from above" seemingly make no such differentiations in unifying the entirety of the consumer class against a vampiric economic totalitarianism in a kind of neo-feudalist oligarchy.[56] Or to put it a different way: grounded in both fear and lack, the ideality of the bourgeoisie arising from this constellation finds its articulation in the image of the consumer that is always being robbed, by the thief, the merchant, the market, or the tax-man.

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[55] Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture," *Signatures of the Visible*, 50-51.

It should be no surprise, then, that as a corrective maneuver to these indeterminacies we should find violence once again figuratively re-posited and recognized as proprietary to *all* spheres inaccessible to a bourgeois experience and consciousness: to the poverty-stricken to whose status one can never fall, and to the immeasurably powerful to whose status one will never rise. Both strata are framed and met with the same degree of *ressentiment*: the underclass as a failure of its subjects' making-good on opportunities freely offered and available, and the powerful as the *Übermenschen* who have, by force or chance, and who lord the fulfillment of that promise over those whom they will prevent at every turn from gaining access to their hoarded largesse. In the mode of Debord's premise that "democracy wants to be judged by its enemies, not its effects"[57] and based in a calculated failure of class consciousness, such archetypically cinematic figures as the "evil CEO," the "corrupt politician," the "dirty cop," the "street thug," the "terrorist," and so forth are permitted to arise and circulate, constituting their *own* bourgeois doppelgängers as breakers or figures of (Self-)defense, comprising a set of proprietary stratifications within the general discursive economy of violence which perhaps ironically enough are ultimately based in manifestly irrevocable notions of the connections between socioeconomic status and violence and even the inherent agonism of class relations.

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[56] But this class consequencelessness introduces yet another crisis to contend with in dislocating the ideality of the bourgeoisie and its sovereign status. This objective determination *of* the bourgeoisie (carrying with it an inactivity in self-determination, ceding this to its outside) also informs its sovereign status. The sovereign's right is to make the exception, to suspend the law, provisionally but absolutely, in *its own* favor; these exceptions are made on behalf of and geared *toward* bourgeois consciousness, but not *by* them. The above notion of the bourgeoisie as mere 'stem cells or drones' refracts here, not as an apologia for bourgeois complicity, be it conscious, unconscious, or mendacious, but rather to situate the ongoing precariousness, vis-à-vis the permanent crisis of their very constitution and situation, of their privileging: the permanent crisis of the bourgeoisie thus inflected is less of constraining proletarian consciousness (that is, the bourgeoisie actively, mendaciously speaking the terms and relations of the proletariat as respectively subjects of enunciation and statements) but of the bolstering enunciation of *bourgeois* consciousness *as sovereign*, on the part of and by the diffuse regimes and regimentations of power external to it. Ultimately, this affirms Deleuze's point that what is ultimately at stake here is not 'mere ideology' (though this gives us a path in), and certainly not in the hands of control of the bourgeoisie, but rather in external but immanent relations of power and force thrust into a precarious balance.

[57] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 24.

The distrust of institutional legitimacy in late capitalism, and particularly in the 1960s-1970s, is thus not only a contributing factor to the audience's limited identification with outlaw-types such as Bonnie and Clyde or *Dog Day Afternoon*'s Sonny, but also to both the ability of that audience to accept, as a matter of course, the idea of the intrinsic violence of the institution as such, and the contestatory constitution of this ideal-consumer as locked in a constant struggle against forces that seek to do it harm. But in the form of the middle-class reaction to the dissolution of bourgeois faith Jameson identifies above, the predominant structure replicates and amplifies itself, allowing us to understand that even this crisis, its apprehension, and its means of negotiation are fundamentally aligned with the permissibilities of the dominant mode of production:

> In the longer run ... the explanation [for identification with such figures] must be sought in the very logic of the commodity system itself, whose programming ends up liquidating even those ideological values (respect for authority, patriotism, the ideal of the family, obedience to the law) on which the social and political order of the system rests. Thus ideal consumers – compared to their protestant-ethic ancestors, with their repressive ethics of thrift and work and self-denial – turn out to be a far more doubtful quantity than their predecessors were when it comes to fighting foreign wars or honoring your debts or cheating on your income taxes. For the citizens of some multinational stage of post-monopoly capitalism, the practical side of daily life is a test of ingenuity and a game of wits waged between the consumer and the giant faceless corporation.[58]

We can certainly recognize allegorizations of these conspiratorial ideations in late-capitalist Hollywood cinema, with their marked Cold War overtones caulked onto and coextensive with the anxieties of its historically-specific spatial crisis, in the metageneric and shopworn tropes of the invasion-narrative – of the "outside" threatening to move in, taking over the insulated domestic sphere and contaminating or defiling it with its violence – which include the crucial and complementary paranoiac tropes of the forces of alterity already lurking, latent within that space. While the persistence and preponderance of such narratives is most recognizable and the anxieties it inculcates most pronounced in the profusion of latter-day horror and suspense films (*Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Jaws* (1975), *The Tenant* (1976), *Halloween*

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[58] Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture," *Signatures of the Visible*, 43-44. Brackets mine.

(1978), *The Amityville Horror* (1979), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), *Scream* (1996), etc.), it is also an operative paradigm in crime dramas and thrillers, and particularly in the case of 1970s revenge films, of which Michael Winner's *Death Wish* (1974) is perhaps most transparently paradigmatic. In this film, the movement of crime, violence, and its agents toward and into the sanctified spaces of bourgeois life is nakedly on display: within the already-criminogenic New York cityscape, a cabal of drug-addicted hooligans first invades the space of the marketplace (the grocery store, where they proceed to destroy goods in a stark mockery of its sanctity and economic purpose) and then (logically) invades and defiles the sanctity of the domestic sphere, entering by disguising themselves as delivery service-workers, taking calculated advantage of the guaranteed and sanctified symbiosis in the producer-consumer relation, acting as destructive agents against social and economic law alike. At the same time, recalling Derrida's astute observation that the acts of law always and as a matter of course arrive "too late," the institutional clockwork of the law runs too slowly and lacks a sweeping hand, failing to exact not only justice, but to take the necessary proactive and comprehensive measures to preserve or reclaim stability (budget cuts, institutional corruption, and the like all exposited as global comorbid conditions for this local failure).

And as with all things violent in a Manichean-relational frame, an equal and opposite reaction is required: Paul Kersey's (Charles Bronson) violent and, while technically unsanctionable, conceptually legitimate(d) crusade is to not simply exact personal revenge, but *to reclaim and proactively defend the conditions of bourgeois privilege* – privileges that not only include a determinate, primarily spatial distance from the forces and threat of violence, but the command and control of social space *tout court*. As an avenging angel on the side of Right (and, as his actions are made public through television coverage, of popular sentiment: the ultimate force of justification), he enters into "their" space, reclaiming it one space at a time (the alley, the sidewalk, the subway); in the absence of new frontiers for flight or settlement (save, perhaps, for the suburbs), the extant space must be cleaned up and reordered in a series of perpetual confrontations to which even the film's closure provides no end. In the final scene, Kersey and the chief of police strike an uneasy but all-too-telling deal: he leaves town (to another space, for another film, that he can reclaim), but his spectral image remains; "he's still out there," the chief tells the press, waiting to return, messianic, apocalyptic, deferred but decisive (or in other terms, *spectral* and *sovereign*).

Death Wish, of course, is only one of so many texts symptomatic of such figurations and framings: *Dirty Harry* (1972), *Walking Tall* (1973), *Falling Down* (1993), and others of this semi-genre all rely upon such appeals to the mythic reclamation and regeneration through violence (to use Slotkin's appropriately frontier-era term) of the totality of American space, now cast in terms of "saving the country from itself" – that is, saving it from its worst byproducts that threaten its image, even if it requires a temporary sojourn from the sphere of institutional legitimacy (a legitimacy that has at worst failed completely, but at best will still recognize that the ends of such actions will absolutely justify the means). The persistence and transpositional perfection of these impulses can be found in amplified and overdetermined form in John McTiernan's *Die Hard* (1998). In the late-Cold War context which saturates the film's conspiratorial and reclamational ethos, we see precisely these same paradigmatic anxieties transposed onto the totality of American social space, from nation to neighborhood to office building, where the newly-permeable home-land, however metonymized, is and must defended all the more urgently *by the bourgeois subject itself* when infiltrated by alien forces and in the generalized failure of the law's institutional guarantees of protectionism (here, for all the postures of defense and deterrence, once "they" invade "our" space, we find ourselves defenseless, at least initially: a paranoid sentiment but also a political critique of foreign-based military deployments and security complexes).

Widely hailed as the paragon for the *fin de siècle* American "action film,"[59] *Die Hard* most clearly combines the requisite conspiratorial and archetypal elements culled from Hollywood's stockroom of best-sellers: the middle-class, man-alone, professional-Western anti-hero (a typically bourgeois construction of the exceptional within the universal), called on and compelled by disruptive circumstance to defeat the multiple foreign threats (congealed around and episodically culminating in the decisive confrontation with the single, antagonistic figure of the supervillain) in order to save the day, restore normalcy, win back the girl and reconstitute the family and community alike. Facing impossible odds, he must use his singular ingenuity to defeat the enemy's numerically and technologically superior force, and be willing to sacrifice himself for the perpetuity of the common good – but not without the fight that will allow him to become the hero he was not necessarily born to be, but that he can and must be, actuating those self-preservative impulses latent in any bourgeois subject in defense of its own territorial and proprietary conditions. In all these ways (though certainly not only in these ways), the film is a trite, contrived, clichéd, and even passé vision of the still-active status of a still-able-to-act bourgeoisie – and for this was phenomenally successful: the degree-zero for both product and its eager consumption, and moreover in its ease of accommodation to the mendacious and conspiratorial consciousness of the contemporary "universal-bourgeois" subject.

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[59] The film's status as point of reference for all other action films to follow has long become its own cliché, moving from the straight-faced promotion of a film like *Speed* (1994) as "Die Hard on a bus!" to Altman's snarky deconstruction of the politics of the high-concept story pitch in *The Player* (1992). And its sequel's title – *Die Hard II: Die Harder* (1990) – certainly demonstrates a certain desperation born of a paucity of imagination and cravenness in innovation that informs the persistence of its clichés and their functions as much as any set of extrinsic demands. For an excellent (and exhaustive) reading of *Die Hard*'s multiple and multiply overdetermined archetypical tropes, see Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland's "Classical/Postclassical Narrative (Die Hard)," in their *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (Oxford UP, 2002).

As a whole, *Die Hard* fulfills its affirmative-conspiratorial pedigree and then some, a comprehensive statement on the late-to-post-Cold War thought of violence and the omnipresent conspiratoriality bearing down on the bourgeoisie, with that thought both reaching its fundamental limit and returning to its most basic and Manichean origins. Per the fallout of the above Jamesonian triumvirate, there are two enemies to be defeated here: the terrorists (Eastern European, second-world entrepreneurial sorts seeking immense monetary gain, a sort of new petty bourgeoisie entering the global market by force as they escape the failing and fading Communist sphere) and the global corporate structure that permits their encroachment on American economy (a structure both abstractly alluded and concretely figured in the New-York-based Nagasaki Headquarters, itself a criminogenic space teeming with the corporate-corrupt and emblematic of the same conspiratorially xenophobic, neo-globalist anxieties seen particularly across films of its decade[60]) are here two sides of the same conspiratorial and "antidemocratic" coin, each using their respective proprietary modes of force and violence to enact their due and assert their invasive, totalitarian power. The final showdown between John McClane (Bruce Willis) and Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman), however, simultaneously reduces these globally-allusive concerns to a mythic "battle of equals" or "meeting of ingenious minds," presenting each as the mirror-image of the other, made of the same material, and by this reinscribes the image of the now-localized interpersonal conflict and all it represents into a mythic "clash of titans" that bears the universal history of such righteous conflicts (David and Goliath, The Battle of Independence, the Civil War, and, in yet another mendacious reversal, even Vietnam[61]).

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[60] Including Terry Gilliam's otherwise relentlessly subversive *Brazil*, where in his dreams Sam must fight not just a figure of the corporate machine, but an enormous mechanical samurai. More than a statement of the neofeudalism of global, corporate capitalism, this very specific cultural reference to the Japanese, at the time expanding real estate holdings in New York to much public outcry, bespeaks yet another layer of geopolitical *ressentiment*: the nation humbled by our force and rebuilt with our largesse ungratefully coming back to haunt and humiliate us.

In the end, of course, the adaptive ingenuity of the determined, aggressively defensive neobourgeois individualist will win out: it is a conclusion already known, and established, well in advance. McClane not only cripples the corporate-foreign threat (the Nagasaki building is reduced to a flaming shell, a violence against property for which he is not held culpable in any way), not only finds an ingeniously violent way to dispose of his localized terrorist adversary (replete with three *acts* – a beating, a shooting, and a defenestration – a progressive narrative in itself) but also, in getting the last word in the negotiation, provides a catch-phrase with which to top it all off. The infamous, inimitable "Yippee-Ki-Yay, Motherfucker!" formally closes the confrontation and the text entire on the side of infinitely remappable American-individualist archetypal traditions: John Wayne, unflappable resolve, the kind of optimism that assures that this conclusion was never once put into doubt – all idealities reified to the point of a punchline known in advance but no less appreciated for it, the "oh, of course!" of the joke withheld to the end *that is the only possible end*, a statement of the flippancy with which any substantive threat to the idea of America and its ideal subjects can, and must, be met. For McClane and the audience alike, these motherfuckers never had a chance.

In its pervasive metagenericity, and all the more urgently in the late-capitalist collapse of social space and new frontiers, with its resultant malleability and permeability of borders of all varieties, this defensive, spatially invested paranoia not only speaks to the generalized crises of spatiality and sovereign integrity. These conceits, however unremarkable and ultimately banalized, ultimately and quite nakedly reaffirm what is at stake in all American commercial cinema, if especially so when it comes to situating violence: the privileging, inviting, and maintenance of a resurrected bourgeois consciousness that, specific to violence, does not (and indeed *cannot*) fully exclude this latter but instead places and embraces it in proper space and proportion, objectified and in careful moderation. Indeed, it is precisely the degree to which these conceits *are* banalized, clichéd, even *common sense* that they can serve their function in the first place; now in light of contemporary demands, violence enters the providential space of the free market, trickles down to settle where most appropriate to its imaginary affinities, becomes as central to the conceptual economy as its likewise "unfortunate effects" (child labor, drug mules, sex slaves, outsourced computer programmers) that likewise are shrugged off as justified by promised systemic ends, becomes a fact of life itself – but not *this* life.

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[61] The recasting of the interests of the United States as "underdogs" against an Evil Empire, and particularly in light of the utter catastrophe of Vietnam, is a common trope across post-conflict Hollywood cinema, remediating the failure of winning the day, recasting the United States and (its) economic-democratic interests – unsurprisingly enough – as the threatened and martyred rebels in a war for global equity (or, in the case of George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977), which to be sure could not have enjoyed even a fraction of its now-mythic popular and even critical success against any other geopolitical backdrop, for intergalactic, *universal* equity).

But *not* this life? Can we not say at this point that while violence is in so many ways the unthought of bourgeois consciousness, this is not despite but exactly because its thought permeates and constitutes its perimeters? As with the cinema's necessity for and means of productive self-inoculation, to constitute the bourgeois subject, and not least in our current context, the presence of and potential for violence *must* be maintained categorically as fact, and indeed *must* be continually present to thought, but never *fully* to the thought of the self. As the paragon of virtue, uncorrupted by power without stops and having achieved through unceasing and vigilant efforts the freedom from all violence of necessity or situation, the figure of the bourgeois fully extricates *itself* from any connection to violence in commission, and by this also in omission: sinless, blameless, ideal, apart … and, from its characteristically paranoiac, defensive perspective, coveted, and, in a truly spectacular *méconnaissance* of its revolutionary impulses in the appropriation of proletariat consciousness, powerful, active, even *threatening*.

And it may well be at this point that the schizophrenia of the neo-bourgeois image is most pronounced, while at the same time most amenable to being reinscribed within the rhythms and mechanics of late capitalism vis-à-vis commercial cinema. For on the one hand, per Lukács formulation, only a true proletarian consciousness (as much a conceptual and existential consequence of prevailing and dominant bourgeois object-relations as a utopian idealization) is capable of discerning the aporias within, and hence the productive capacity of, the bourgeois totality of which the subject is a part. As Jameson puts it,

> (w)hat Lukács must show is that proletarian thought has precisely the capacity for resolving antinomies which middle-class thinking by its very nature was unable to deal with. He must show how something in the structure of proletarian thought permits access to the totality or reality, to that totalizing knowledge which was the stumbling block of classical bourgeois philosophy, with the resultant replacement of the static model of knowledge from which the classical middle-class dilemmas sprang. Something must be found in the very existential situation of the proletarian himself which corresponds, as a concrete reality, to that *union of subject and object*, of knower and known, which Hegel posited as a solution to the Kantian problem of the thing-in-itself in the domain of pure thought. This privileged nature of the worker's situation lies, paradoxically, in its narrow, inhuman limits: the worker is unable to know the outside world in a static, contemplative manner in one sense because he cannot know it all, because his situation does not give the leisure to intuit it in the middle-class sense; because, even before he posits elements of the outside world as *objects* of his thought, he feels *himself* to be an object, and this initial alienation within himself takes precedence over everything else.[62]

The "union of subject and object" (or, as he reframes it in "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," the collapse of the very dualism of the distinction, which he situates as a properly cinematic phenomenon[63]) that Jameson isolates in his iteration of Lukács' proletarian consciousness is crucial to highlight, as it is not only of a piece with the characteristic schizophrenia he identifies with the "postmodern condition," not only the point of crisis for the bourgeoisie encountering itself in the wake of late capitalism as an object of history, but also precisely of the same kind that the cinema actualizes and addresses in its encounter: the inherently self-alienating quality of that encounter redoubled and amplified along the lines of class processes, absolutely requiring a certain, if limited, modality of proletarian being (in other terms, as the "worker" posited in Beller's schizophrenic "worker-spectator" dyad). But on the other hand, this socio-spectatorial positioning (and all its promise for its alienating qualities to truly take hold and "take precedence over everything else") is at the same time undercut by and sublated into the bourgeois-centric characteristics of objectivity of perspective, ideal-individualistic figurations as sites of identification, and, organizing and deriving from both of these, the primary spectatorial relation to the film-text as commodity for which time and money are both exchanged.

And it is this last, ultimately, that decisively tips the balance. To be sure, in the prevailing service-economy of late capitalism, *all* consciousness is immanently bound up, if in varying degrees, in a consumer consciousness that is fundamentally and indissolubly bourgeois: beyond one's actual conditions of material socioeconomic reality, the purely objective and objectivizing character of bourgeois thought is what informs the specific relation to commodities, production, and consumption necessary for capitalism – to say nothing of commercial cinema and the violent imaginary – to operate, and what in the end is the necessary condition for any subject to be considered (and to consider itself) as of a part of this totality. Because, today more than ever, "(i)t is commodities that structure our original relationship to objects of the world, that shape the categories through which we see all other objects,"[64] and because "for the bourgeoisie, a commodity is a solid material thing whose cause is relatively unimportant, relatively secondary: his relationship to such an object is one of pure consumption (...) in the timeless 'natural' present of the middle-class universe (with its corresponding emphasis on man as a universal),"[65] these conditions alone are sufficiently forceful to circumvent the potential for a "properly proletarian consciousness" to arise, while at the same time (and as we have certainly seen) remaining flexible enough in their parameters of inclusion to incorporate and make productive use of prevailing social and discursive realities, including even those indissoluble contradictions of fact made clear in the era's class crises.

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[62] Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 186-187. Emphasis of "union of subject and object" mine.
[63] See p.179 n.80.

At base a matter of *perspectivity*, this conclusion returns us to the formal and spatial problematics we introduced in opening, and how, in the presentation of violent content, they intersect with and reinforce the identificatory and figurative elements just discussed: actively and perpetually reproducing not simply a bourgeois-identified subject, but more fundamentally a relation to and consciousness of violence specific to those already-presupposed spatial and sovereign characteristics of ideal neobourgeois consciousness. We will return our focus to these matters now.

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[64] Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 187.
[65] Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 187-188.

SPACES OF VIOLENCE, SPACES OF CONSUMPTION: SCENE, EVENT, EPISODE

> *An event which in principle has no consequences outlasting its own duration is called an episode; … the episode … breaks into the story without being part of it. The episode is a self-enclosed event. Each new episode is, so to speak, an absolute beginning, but equally absolute is its ending: 'not to be continued' is the last sentence of this story (even if, to make the plight of the unwary yet more bitter, it is written in invisible ink). The problem is, though … that the decision about the finality of the ending itself is never final. One would never know whether the episode is truly over and done with. All the effort to prevent it notwithstanding, past events may return to haunt future presents.*[66]

Zygmunt Bauman
Postmodernity and its Discontents

> *But one is tempted to wonder whether … everything that comes before us as a scene is not, in some way, the deserted "scene of a crime," where the scandal and the violence, the punctuality and irrevocality of "crime" is simply shorthand for the unexpected emergence of the Event as such. The category of the "scene," of space organized scenically, is the correlative of the category of the Event: the former causes the latter to emerge in expectation or in memory, just as the latter powerfully reorganizes the inertia of space in to a place of ritual and a kind of momentarily deserted center. It is this new form, the radically ephemeral appearance of the scene as such within a different type of space, that Heidegger calls the "clearing" (or Lichtung) of Being. What causes it to come into visibility, however, can only be narrative itself, which, a little more than the mere pretext for such lyric moments (although it is easy to see why we tend to think in those terms), sharpens our attention to events and cause us to read spatial settings in ways that predispose us for this momentary vision.*[67]

Fredric Jameson
"The Existence of Italy"

As suggested in opening, every scene in narrative cinema, considered in itself and even apart from the overarching narrative patterns which include it in its set, presents a specific spatio-temporal holism, a self-enclosed logic, stability, and unity. However, at least dramaturgically speaking, every scene is also made to be broken, interrupted, dissolved by an action that cuts through its initial stabilities and works toward its destabilization. Analogous to the unnerving effect of sustained perspective, if nothing happens within the space of the scene presented (think Antonioni, think Godard, think certain moments in Kubrick), indeed if nothing disrupts the scene's established tableau or milieu, a state of dis-ease is introduced: the eye, sharpened in its attention within this space (as Jameson observes above), frantically and disconcertedly scans the stage with particular acuity, seeking any locus from which the eventual action, the eventual event that defines and justifies the presence of the scene as such, might arise.

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[66] Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 91.
[67] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 193.

Because the scene conscribes a milieu in which events will happen, it always-already posits a space of anticipation, expectation, and desire. Moreover, it circumscribes a zone of containment, producing a relatively non-relational space in which an event (empirically violent or otherwise) is permitted and encouraged to be objectively presented and savored without extensive narratological or ethical consideration. Thus, any event whatever, like the scene which presents it, becomes a commodity, and its enjoyment, mirroring its insular presentation and relative conscription of aetiology and effects, is fundamentally without consequence. The inverse of this statement, then, is also true, and will be taken up again in closing: it is as much the case that the violent event is made amenable to unproblematic consumption as it is that consumption itself ascends to the level of this reconfigured character of the event – in other words, consumption, as an absolutely contained activity, as event, without mind to processes of production or systemic consequence, in a Jamesonian "delirium of consumption" given meter in an unending succession of present moments, and in which not only are bourgeois class processes fully inhabited, but where the processes and the event of consumption itself become the object.

The episodic framing of violent acts or events as self-contained "set-pieces" which puncture, structure, and quicken the narrative thus reflects and caters to the demands of contemporary bourgeois consumer consciousness in three ways. First, as argued more extensively in Chapter Two, the capture of the profilmic event always-already objectively (and hence pleasurably) frames that event within a certain spatio-temporal holism and offers it to a detached, mute perspectivity. Second, within the space of the episode, the event is guaranteed a hermetic finality and a relatively decisive quality, devoid of subsequent repercussions save for those that bear on the advancement of the narrative qua plot (the latter, of course, being inherently episodic). From this and finally – and in such a way that is particularly resonant with the Self-image of the bourgeois subject itself – the episode is at once extrinsic to and extricable from the totality (legible and consumable on purely its own terms) and critical to that totality which, on screen and off, is marked by a Jamesonian series of present moments, unfolding one unto another but with no intrinsic developmental or relational necessity: in other words, the episode (as the narratological unit proper to the postmodern) and the violence it "contains" are consequently rendered as natural and even necessary to that narrativization and the mode of existence to which it corresponds, to the economy of the text and to the spectacularized economy of violence. The violent episode is thus not only of a piece with the politics of consumption in spectacular society, but also contains the entirety of its logic in each hermetic moment.

The scene, then, simultaneously allows for the emergence of an event, heralds its coming, and safely contains it within a purely objective (and infinitely re-productive) frame. It is thus that, even without additional, overdetermining factors of the type we have already discussed (however much these undoubtedly contribute to the overall effect), every scene *as scene* presents a charged space of expectation wherein something must happen, however terrible. As an affectively charged space, the scene demands an investment in its very establishment, positing a promise (and even a *threat*) before the fact of any event emerging within it, and hence positioning the viewer, across class-process lines, as precisely the worker-spectator Beller describes, simultaneously performing labor and extracting value. As such, the promise of action or violence always-already posited by the scene as its *raison d'être* is concordant with the modalities of consumer consciousness to which commercial cinema caters as part and parcel with its specious appeals toward bourgeois class identification, and particularly here as it demands, structures, and facilitates an engagement with the prototypically bourgeois class processes of eager and anxious consumption as each scene opens and is apprehended from an objective distance.

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Undeniably, contemporary Hollywood cinema is a cinema of such scenic moments and pseudo-Events, self-contained singularities with a singular focus and purpose: to exhilarate and thrill, in another rearticulation of the age-old logic of the cinema of attractions.[68] While this certainly owes something to the medium's ontological affinity with "the moment" (and especially in the coordinate privileging of the violent moment), we must also understand this impulse vis-à-vis the most basic commercial character of this cinema, the promises it puts forth in and as its commodities, and the consumer consciousness toward which it takes aim. The primacy of the episode-scene, for which the surrounding narrative is in so many ways merely "pretext" (as Jameson says, if with a different kind of scene-effect in mind), posits every scene, and every event therein, as *part of a movement of episodic unfolding*: each scene, taken as episode once something happens therein, hermetically sealed, each contribution to the movement of the text in its totality an individually operative and consumable *end in itself*, in other words, a *commodity*, and one which opens the promise of more (and better) to come in a continuous series of consumable moments, *a continuation and continuity of the logic of consumption.*[69]

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[68] But, I would hasten to add, this is *not* symptomatic, as one might be tempted to think, only of the present moment and some kind of fragmentary "postmodern aesthetic": indeed, as Umberto Eco notes, even the most paradigmatic of Classical Hollywood's films – Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* – is primarily a hodgepodge assembly of memorable moments without any intrinsic relation to each other apart from their character as memorable or singular episodes loosely connected by a flimsy narrative thread; this, for Eco, is the primary condition for which it is so adored. Indeed, for Eco this is precisely why the film, and films like it, are so amenable to cult followings – an indictment not simply of a cinema beholden to the logic of "bang for the buck" above all else, but also of a consumer society in which the individual and community are defined and brought together in "common taste" and a compulsory fetishization of *anything* that is framed or can be conceived as a commodity. (*Travels in Hyperreality*, 197-211)

At the same time and by this same logic, while the episode (as Bauman notes above) presents something of an interruption to narratological continuity, and hence a space in which a Jamesonian "momentary vision" – a consciousness of the scene *as* scene, the moment *as* moment – may arise, the logic, demands, and force of that continuity, however tenuous, that organizes these moments, are ultimately *not* suspended *within* the episode. Indeed, quite the contrary: inasmuch as the primary condition of its inclusion in the narrative's set is its formal concordance and agreement with the whole, the character of the episode is in no way violent to the smooth continuity of the text's movement (a kind of charged parody of the purely *ornamental* moment, in Kracauer's terminology, as "an end in itself,"[70] extricable from the set as a whole and able to "stand on its own") but rather fully informed and authorized by the logic of that which surrounds it (i.e., the set permitting its segmentation inasmuch as the segment, the scene, retains the kernels of its logic, functioning as its least-divisible unit, as a full strand of DNA).

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[69] This logic also holds true for sequels, which in their own way (and as Ray and Jameson both note) are very much proper to late capitalism (the "dea(r)th of innovation" present in pastiche and the recycling and return of the familiar), and can also be considered within this frame as episodes in their own right: as University of Pennsylvania professor George Gerbner notes in an interview in *20th Century with Mike Wallace: Violence in the Media* (A&E Television Networks, 1996), there is a trend (and implicit promise) in sequels to quantitatively exceed the violence in the film-episode before it; for example, *Death Wish* contains nine killings, whereas its sequel presents fifty-two, and *First Blood*'s sixty-two killings are handily trumped by its sequel's (*Rambo: First Blood Part II*) one hundred six.

[70] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 76.

The destruction of Paris in Michael Bay's preeminently episodic-spectacular (and unapologetically commercial) actioner *Armageddon* (1998) aptly illustrates all of these notions, as an episode of violence that posits an insular but charged space in which an event will inevitably occur, that stands and presents itself as simultaneously a node of narrative progression and a self-contained scenic story in its own right, and – perhaps most crucially – that operates independently of the presence or thought of any figures, hence relations or consequences. Presented in a single, unbroken shot, the scene nonetheless plays out in three recognizable acts: establishment of space (a wide-shot of the Parisian landscape), intrusion of the destructive element into that space (the meteor, on the horizon of the field, hurtling toward its point of impact), and the inevitable resolution in apocalyptic violence (a rolling wave of destruction from the point impact as the city collapses and blows apart); by the end, the very space itself has been obliterated in its entirety, wiped clean, exhausted. Extrinsically, the function of narrative progression is fulfilled, opening from its scene of apocalypse (a nominal and formal closure of the sequence) the promise of another similar scene yet to come, and moreover serving as motivation for the next set of expositional and volitional elements to emerge. Intrinsically, however, the scene exhausts itself, encapsulated and singular; the objective-transcendental point of view through which the scene is framed and presented all the more separates this episode as such, objectively presenting and demarcating its experience and effects at a determinate distance from the American sphere of action with which the narrative is exclusively concerned.[71] Furthermore, there are not only no subjects, victims, figures, faces, or individual identities whatsoever to contend with, there is no necessity for them: only the gleefully recorded and received destruction of an artificial space, a truly imaginary space that doubles as the image of space itself, as an image of Paris (a pastiche of signifiers – Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, the Louvre – assembled for sufficient verisimilitude without regard for geographical actuality), an image of the malleability of spaces in late capitalism, an image of the ephemeral integrity of *any* space in cinema (and, as Beller would have it, also in a world organized like it) as what Deleuze calls, though to very different ends, an "any-space-whatever."[72]

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[71] The unapologetic US-centricity of the film's ideological core is nakedly on display in another episode in the film, where before the "working-class astronauts" depart on their mission, the US President addresses the world. His speech, fraught with references to the New Testament and Enlightenment eschatology, is intercut not only with the standard images signifying local participants and their concerns (the worried but confident fiancée, the reluctant but determined heroes facing destiny as they ascend to the shuttle, the mission control commander's concern and admiration for the crew, etc.) but also with likewise emblematic images from across the nation and the world entire: a young Black boy holding a radio in a deserted urban intersection, gazing toward the sky; undifferentiated Asians in urban and rural settings gazing at televisions; legions of Indians bowing simultaneously in prayer before the Taj Mahal – one world, linked through Western communications and united by an American image.

The pleasure of the episode-scene, then, is as much in what it promises and offers as the means by which that pleasure is guaranteed: determinate distance, abstracting objectification, and formal encapsulation. This basic premise is both illustrated and literalized in a sequence from Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), wherein Capt. Dallas (Tom Skerritt) searches for the alien entity in the *Nostromo*'s network of airshafts.[73] In the enclosed space of the airshafts, a series of irises (appropriately enough) open and close, segmenting and meting out spaces of potential violence through which he moves in sequence. This sequential segmentation is punctuated in the sequence's overall structure in briefly cutting back to the control room – where the crew anxiously observes his progress from segment to segment on a monitor, Dallas and the alien each represented by a blip of light – with each space's passing, then returning to Dallas as each new scene-space opens.

To be sure, the affective charges that arise here can be understood in any number of ways: the originary anticipatory structure of the fort/da game (cutting between the safe space

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[72] While charged with potentiality (the scene set so that an action or transformation may occur), constituted as a void from both ends (in the space as initially presented, as depopulated, a "mere set," to its emptiness in the wake of its leveling), and contrapositionally disconnected from the primary spatial grounds in which the "real action" is taking place (the spaces immediate to the protagonists, the U.S. government in their planning, the United States itself), *Armageddon*'s Paris is a *reified parody* of the Deleuzian any-space whatever, in line more with the empty and imaginary "existence of Italy" that Jameson notes than with those Deleuze finds in Antonioni's and Bergman's fields of lyrical abstraction, or Lumet's and Cassavete's undifferentiated city-spaces. Here, Paris, for all its textual-presentational specificity as Paris, is both undifferentiated and indeterminate – first by its framing as yet another site of spectacular violence and second by its presentation as a pastiche of pictorially-composed signifiers, in its "Paris-ness"– but at the same time, and by these same framings, also sufficiently differentiated and sufficiently determinate for the necessary externalizations to be carried out.

[73] While I don't believe this confounds the point being advanced here (that the scene as such always promises to open on an event), the overdetermining figural elements completing this mise-en-scène are worth noting. The figure of the alien itself (and particularly mapped against its unforeseeable but inevitable encounter, as the event of the encounter with the other) certainly contributes to the promise of violence as a figure of absolute alterity and inhumanity, hence absolute violence. This inhumanity-violence trope indeed structures the entire film, and is further articulated in the character Ash (Ian Holm), an android who not only poetically admires the pure violence of the beast, but who also turns against and tries to kill Lt. Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) when she attempts to interfere with the Corporation's likewise inhuman plan to expend the crew in the interest of capturing this "killing machine" for study. This particular triple figuration – Ash-Alien-Corporation as inhuman, mechanical, and systemically pure killing machines against the communally human crew – is interesting in two regards: first because it directly implicates corporate operations with an intrinsic, systemic will to violence (thereby rearticulating both the tropes of the conspiratoriality and "anti-humanness" of violence), and secondly because it casts that violence against a common humanity in which the class distinctions previously operative within the film (the upstairs-downstairs melodrama between the officers and mechanical crew) fully dissolve into a basic man-vs.-machine dualism.

and the charged space, each intensifying the other in the process), the characteristic structure of knowing/not knowing inhering in the suspense narrative (inasmuch as the crew/audience sees the alien approaching Dallas and he cannot), and so forth. But the sequence's emphasis on episodic/scenic segmentarity and separation highlight and redouble the degree to which perspectivity, distance, and representation are critical to the intensity and quality of spectatorial engagement: Dallas' isolation within the shaft-space (the space of impending and promised violence) creates fear in the crew, who watch his crude representation (a blip, a mere cipher) as it progresses through the spaces, comes into contact with the alien-cipher, and ultimately dies in darkness; their reaction to his image's disappearance is of a horror not just of the fact of his death, but as if the gruesome event – also not presented to the audience – had been directly witnessed. On the spectatorial side of things (audience and crew, to some extent, operating on the same frequency), the death of Dallas is a purely commoditized event: it is relatively expected and anticipated (not least in continuing the legacy of *Psycho,* which had already set something of a precedent for all subsequent thrillers, by replicating its early and abrupt disposal of the protagonist and more generally by establishing and presenting typically post-classical "unsafe spaces"[74] that make such violence an anticipated inevitability), objectively abstracted (to luminescent phosphors: that is, to the element of the image, light, disconnected from meaningful form and matter), and formally encapsulated, distanced, and contained (in scenic space, in representation, and also narratologically: for both Dallas and the spectator's and crew's investment in him, it *is* "not to be continued;" he disappears with his representation forever, his passing merely motivating further action and promising to give rise to new episodic situations as the film ticks toward its inevitable, final confrontation).[75] And each of these qualities is intensified to the degree that the act of perceiving itself, in the objective emergence of perspectivity as the sequence's operative trope, removes the event from its frame of immediacy: we see them seeing, their act (and limits) of seeing framed for our anxious and anticipatory pleasure as it replicates and corresponds to our own. In the end, the spectator's position is objectively redoubled, turned back not only upon itself, but *at* itself, with objective and objectivizing perspectivity itself ultimately framed as the object of consumption, and rendered as both the condition and the reward for participating in the scene's intertwined economies of violence and pleasure. In this, the episode is not simply the space within which whatever event occurs and becomes an object of and for consumption, but constitutes itself *as event* in a stark, reified mockery of the definition of the event Deleuze and Jameson describe as the very emergence of consciousness of perspectivity and point of view: here, perceiving is coterminous with consuming, and bourgeois perspectivity itself becomes the privileged and privileging commodity.

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[74] Richard Maltby discusses this phenomenon in some detail in *Hollywood Cinema* (219-220), where it is summarized as follows: "Post-Classical Hollywood cinema has frequently disrupted the audience's sense of the screen as a safe space to look at. The unsafe space of post-*Psycho* "nightmare movies" is actively malign, seeking to catch the viewer unawares and stab screen space when the audience least expects it. Movies may assault their audiences physically, stabbing them in the eye with flashes of light, rapid, disjointed cutting, or sudden movement. The frame can be violently penetrated by a murderous implement, at any moment and from any angle. Typically, unsafe space empowers malign characters, capable of moving through screen space in a manner incomprehensible or invisible to the audience, and threatening both sympathetic characters and viewers with their sudden, unpredictable appearance. In such movies, the audience is associated with the fictional victims, even when the camera's viewpoint is that of the monster as it attacks. Unsafe space disorients the viewer, emphasizing te power of a movie's image track to control the viewer's look." (494)

[75] Proving Baumann's theorem that "past events may return to haunt future presents," in his 2004 "Director's Cut" Ridley Scott reincorporated a brief scene where Ripley, as she is fleeing to the Nostromo's escape vessel

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The episodic scenarization of violence in commercial narrative cinema is ultimately of a conceptual and operative piece with the one of the most fundamental characteristics of the violent imaginary, where violence is conceptualized as random yet contained, as encapsulated and discretely explosive. Contained within the space of the episode and thus to a tenuous holism and concordance with the totality of the film-text's formal and narratological movements, the sense of violence as irruptive within that totality, disruptive to that flow, and by extension disruptive to the very politics and logistics of both the spectacular imaginary and the violent imaginary with which it is entwined, is lost. Violence has again carved out a space for itself – or rather has had a space carved around it, for it, accommodating it – within which the extent of its effects are constrained in direct proportion to the consciousness of its causes.

What we might draw from this is not only how the basic qualities of the episode serve an explicitly affirmative function – and especially as regards the underlying conspiratoriality of contemporary class and consumer consciousness: no "safe space" to be found – but also how it facilitates the mapping of one conceptual spatial framework to

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in the final reel, stumbles across a cocooned (and decidedly *not* dead) Dallas. Dallas, to achieve his heroic end, begs for Ripley to sacrifice him, both so he will no longer serve the other with his flesh and so that she can stop lingering on him and escape in time. In a gesture towards such finalizations, she obliges.

another, from the space of cinema to the space of the world, spectacularly mediated and interchangeable, exchangeable and equivalent, without difference or remainder. In this, violence comes all the more to inhabit those spaces to which its presence is necessarily relegated in bourgeois thought, to geographical and geopolitical exteriorities where violence *must* happen (the urban back-alley, the abandoned house, the Third World): spaces in which nothing "productive" is happening, and therefore *something else must happen* – a "something else" that can only entail violence, and as such represents a constant that authorizes all the more this transpositionality of charged spaces, each and all alike in quality and kind.

The generalized state of expectation inaugurated by the scene – the desire not only for an action to occur, but for the scene to be radically undone by any event whatever – is certainly doubly charged (and doubly repaid) when combined with those accommodatory attributions and expectations of violence wedded to typical class-representative figures and the spaces that they typify. In the wedding reception sequence that closes the first act of Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), with its union-hall setting populated with unmistakably lumpenproletariat bodies (overweight, unkempt, uncouth, and unapologetically excessive in libidinal and libational appetites), it comes as no surprise whatsoever that a brawl breaks out on the dance floor, for either the audience or the characters within the scene (indeed, the violence hardly disrupts the festivities): it is fully anticipated and expected, to an extent that the absence of violence from these overdetermined ingredients would render the scene cloying, and worse, "inauthentic." Similarly, the establishing shot of a ramshackle home in Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black* (1997) instantaneously signals a space in which some kind of violence must erupt: the bleak rural vista; the tumbledown structure with its peeling paint, rotting wood and canted roof; the blighted and barren lawn on which a single, bony cow grazes free; the rusted, dented, aged pickup truck occupying left frame foreground; all add up to the instantaneous and unmistakable image of the exurban "white-trash hick" in such a way that the only possible sonic complement to the pictorial *mise-en-scène* is the vitriolic male voice that dutifully comes booming from within the house, as Edgar (Vincent D'Onofrio) spews violent threats against his wife. Nor is it surprising that the meteor which hurtles into the scene, destroying his truck, demands and is met with a satisfaction secondary only to that brought with his killing moments later.

While these scenes are radically different in most regards, in both cases, the attributions and expectations at work absolutely require a preexisting identification with a naturalized and presupposed bourgeois perspective, a perspective that actively constitutes and completes the scene as much as what is explicitly present(ed) therein, and that is complicit in synthesizing these signifiers into such a space where violence is not simply *expected*, but *demanded*, and moreover *accepted*. In this, we can see a more forceful (but also more problematic) articulation of the bourgeois thought of violence, the proprietary spaces into which the latter is necessarily relegated, and from which the former is ideally excluded. In the face of such promissory scenarizations, the dismissive and maliciously resentful character of bourgeois consciousness toward its maligned other that such spatial mappings entail – the "oh, of course, there they go again," the "well, I suppose that's terrible, but what else could one expect," the "no great loss," the "they got what they deserved" – is coupled with and productively exploits a *recognition* of the character of systemic violence: that these naturally attributed violences are manifest effects of others, and moreover that in any tendentially totalizing state, violence is to be expected and, indeed, is of a necessary piece with the contemporary world-picture, as either an effect of or a reaction to that state, with these violent irruptions symptomatically and episodically framed and positioned as tactical strikes *within* an otherwise ordered causal system, *but not against its logic* – a logic from which the neobourgeois subject is simultaneously categorically excluded and embroiled, an inclusive exclusion that is always unstable and under some form of threat.

Because spectacular society and the violent imaginary define the image of the world in its entirety in relation to the desires and anxieties of the bourgeois subject, this subject's *explicitly* posited presence in such alterior spaces sharpens the focus on this threatening quality all the more. This dialectic is perhaps most pronounced in the persistent spatial, figural, and narratological formations which cast this neobourgeois subject as a stranger in strange lands, unmoored from its legitimizing, valorizing, and protective frames (in other words, as bare life in fields where the sovereign exception does not decide in its favor). As I have alluded in the case of *Bonnie and Clyde*, this subject can best be understood as a kind of *tourist* traversing spaces of violence, not unlike a hunter on safari or, for that matter, the spectator before the screen. On the one hand, the displacement and centeredlessness of the neobourgeois subject (its traditional guarantors relatively destabilized, with the field of potential class identifications and compacts intrinsically dynamic and fluid) posits a general non-fixity that corresponds to the figure of the tourist, alighting in the most situationally advantageous locales but always mobile, circulating. At the same time, for Zygmunt Bauman this metaphorical figure (something of the mirror-image of the Deleuzian nomad) is closely connected with the episode as an experiential category, and symptomatic of the effects of late capitalism's "detemporalization of social space"[76] on identity itself: a peculiarly (and indeed sinisterly parodic) diasporic consciousness where the guarantors of identity are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, where such encounters with those guarantors are fleeting stopovers, chosen at will, and from this endowed with a sense (if only that) of sovereign "situational control": "the ability to choose where and with what parts of the world to 'interface' and when to switch off the connection,"[77] or in other terms, always occupying a transitional, mediated, and mediatory space, simultaneously within and apart from the scene – a spectatorial subjectivity as much informed by a cinematic/spectacular paradigm as by the fluidity of late capitalism's enabling compacts and nonrelations.

Along these lines, Roland Joffe's *The Killing Fields* (1984) is particularly instructive. In this film, postwar Cambodia serves as a useful metonym for the Third World entire, as much an image of political transition and protocapitalist development as a figuration of a "land of less-developed moral principles," relaying the intrinsic and opposed violences of development and revolution via the presence and perspective of bourgeois protagonists – American journalists, particularly Sydney Schanberg (Sam Waterston) – who provide an identificatory-affective inroad into this foreign territory. True to conventional form, *The Killing Fields*' image of the streets of Phnom Penh is a space where violence is always bubbling close to the surface: it is, from its very establishment (and without any necessary preface about the specificities of the place and its situation), an intrinsically unstable space that may erupt at any moment, and does. The violence of the attacks is in the pure mode of the tactics and experience of terrorism: there is no anticipatory, preparatory build-up in the mode of building suspense by tracking the machinations of the insurgents, and the film focuses and lingers only on the immediacy of the acts and their immediate consequences. But while the inevitable, terroristic militia attacks and their aftermath are not narrativized in the traditionally American mode, they are neither totally unexpected: this is a space of occupation and the ruin of war, of poverty and underdeveloped infrastructure, of terror and brutality in which violence is always lurking, waiting to emerge.

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[76] Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, 90.
[77] Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, 91.

Before the fact, then, the scene is already set. Like the union-hall filled with the working-class in *The Deer Hunter*, the inevitability of violence has already been *symbolically* established and implanted, a matter of *when*, not *if*. Likewise, against this backdrop and in the positioning of scenes in the public sphere (that is, in transitioning from the hotel sanctuary to the open streets), this inevitability is also *formally* established and implanted: each establishing shot of this scene-space, preceding the visualization of our Western protagonists within it, situate them as much as in any horror film as potential victims and natural targets. Par for this course, within this space (and further, within each of the episodic militia attacks), Schanberg's reactions are, "realistically," of startlement, panic, and self-preservative determination – but not by any means of horror or disbelief; the same holds true for the spectator, for whom these irruptions are likewise certainly shocking but not entirely unanticipated. Within the scenes of violence that erupt, scenes that themselves are constituted within the *lingua franca* of the typified geopolitical space of the Third World nation, Schanberg (and the spectator) is immersed, in a certain sense subject to its own political and symbolic structures so steeped in the inevitability of violence that his actions and reactions are fully ensconced within its logic, exigencies, and vicissitudes.

The truest (and most telling) terror that emerges on Schanberg's face, in fact, arises in reaction to the narrativized montage of the violence in Phnom Penh that is revealed on the American news programs he watches weeks later in his hotel room: it is only once he is at a geographic, media-ted, and insulated distance from the imminent and immanent violence of the Third World that he can absorb the vastness of its scope, paradoxically distilled into miniaturized episodes, with the appropriate degree of sadness, shock, traumatic urgency and, finally, *guilt*. Once a mere tourist in hostile territory, above the fray but not outside it, anthropologically relaying to the Western world an insular image of the categorically hostile space of the other, now safely enveloped again within an endemically bourgeois space, he can finally synthesize the meaning of his immersion within that environment and its systemic patterns of political violence, there taken for granted as immediate fact and not consequence.

But at the same time, as with *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Dog Day Afternoon*, the historical and geopolitical situation is "flattened" in the narrative, both displayed and displaced. The premature withdrawal of American troops from the decimated Cambodian sphere of operations was of course the primary factor culpable for this state of generalized chaos; this fact is never presented explicitly in the film, but the subsequent quest of Schanberg to rescue Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor, himself a survivor of the pogrom, a well-publicized fact) from the Khmer Rouge concentration camps, the reformatory guilt that motivates him, certainly speaks to a sense of responsibility. Nonetheless, the affirmative-corrective expiatory function of this narrative – the saving of one man as a symbolic expungement of all debts – and the film's general narrative thrust as a story of intense, interpersonal friendship, distracts from the idea that Schanberg's quest is symptomatic or emblematic of anything but the extension of a universalizing (if spuriously applied) logic: *common* decency to *one's* fellow *man*, an image of equity that both calls forth and dissipates the ethical quandary specific to the structural violence of contemporary postcolonial geopolitics by recourse to an affective universality.

NEGOTIATION AND NEGATION:
IN THE FACE OF THE OTHER, IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE

> *Because cinema is a gaze which is substituted for our own in order to give us a world that corresponds to our desires, it settles on faces, on radiant or bruised but always beautiful bodies, on this glory or this devastation which testifies to the same primordial nobility, of this chosen race that we recognize as our own...*
>
> Michel Mourlet

> *For ethics is irredeemably locked into categories of the individual, when not in fact individualism as such: the situations in which it seems to hold sway are necessarily those of homogeneous relations within a single social class. But only those whose thinking has been irreparably damaged by empiricism can imagine that to pronounce the end of ethics (beyond good and evil!) is tantamount to recommending wholesale violence and the Dostoyevskian 'anything goes,' rather than a solemn historical judgment on the inadequacy of certain mental categories.*[78]
>
> Fredric Jameson
> "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity"

> *The law is crazy!*
>
> "Harry Callahan" (Clint Eastwood)
> *Dirty Harry*

Certainly, the general qualities of the "violent episode" provide the conditions for a specific affinity with the presumed and preferred universality of bourgeois consumer consciousness, a formal containment and showcase-quality that, for lack of a better term, "packages" the violence at hand, and ultimately in such a way that simultaneously arrests, encapsulates, and propels the movement of the narrative. But again, it is not enough to simply or consistently present a neutral or singular field geared toward a presumedly neutral and singular subject-position: the fact of these apposite and opposing spaces coming directly into contact is not simply inevitable, but necessary to represent for the maintenance of the vigilant bourgeoisie, their conspiratorial consciousness, and their identity both as consumers and with class processes of consumption. The multiple *potential* crises of consciousness and conscience entailed in this encounter with the other are paradigmatically mediated by setting that encounter within contexts of *dialogue* and *rationalism* of relation and response.

As with the aporetic relation between law and violence, the relations between these specified figures are intrinsically problematic and insoluble, but always economic. We can understand such an economy vis-à-vis the dynamics of force at hand, in the relations between affector/affected or (mapping the reversal of class processes) producer/recipient, in the surplus of force accrued and displayed as the expressive enactment of power that retroactively justifies that power. But, recalling the aforementioned case of the figure of lawlessness sharing the same space as the victim of his violence – a case, critically, that *was* permissible by the foundational terms of commercial cinematic language – we have an interesting conundrum: on the one hand, this demonstrates the linkage between the lawless and violence (thus determining both in a discretely contained illicit space); on the other, it also and even more problematically concatenates the conditions of agency with the disobeyance of (or worse, nonregard for) the law. Those encounters with the other which explicitly present the violence embedded in the Manichean intersubjective economy always threaten to undo that economy, to dissolve that quality and ascription – violence – that tenuously guarantees the distinction: when violence is proprietary to "both sides," and with both sides "above (or beyond) the law," the indistinction is untenable. As Derrida notes,

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[78] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, 94-95.

> this economy [the intersubjective economy: the relation between self and other] is the transcendental symmetry of two empirical asymmetries. The other, for me, is an ego which I know in relation to me as to an other. (…) The movement of transcendence toward the other, as invoked by Levinas, would have no meaning if it did not bear within it, as one of its essential meanings, that in my ipseity I know myself to be other for the other. Without this, "I" (in general: egoity), unable to be the other's other, would never be the victim of violence. The violence of which Levinas speaks would be violence without victim. But since, in the dissymmetry which he describes, the author of violence could never be the other himself, but always the same (ego), and since all egos are others for others, the violence without victim would be also a violence without author. And all these propositions can be reversed without difficulty.[79]

Situating not only the basic (and ethically necessary) dissonance of violence to bourgeois thought (as the concerted, if mendacious, non-relation to the other and all it represents and carries with it) and the means by which it is expunged (by defeating, killing, or sacrificing the other to whom violence is proprietary, and whose very presence entails a certain violence to the self and its determination), this passage also highlights (and, indeed, casts a somewhat different light on) the fundament of the conspiratorial problematic and its attendant anxious vigilance that are particularly pronounced in cinematic texts of this time: if one cannot be the victim of violence, one has nothing to fight for (or, for that matter, against); one can by these terms still always prevail, however, but (and this is no where clearer than in the abuse these "noble faces" and bodies endure) still with a humanized, mortal quality. Moreover, by clearly individuating and delineating the face of both the identificatory agent and its other, the entire field of the ethical enters the equation in such a way as to qualify the requisite consumability of that encounter qua episode. In other, simpler terms, things become far too *close* for comfort in such a scenario, and the proximities and inclusions necessary to articulate the requisite conspiratorial relation threaten to undo the entire enterprise.

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[79] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 126. Brackets mine.

But however much these more intimate, intersubjective encounters threaten to reintroduce ethical problematics into the field of "consuming violence," they are also symbolically and formally resolved, by the unspoken codification of Code-era shot relations that have since become convention, in the shot-reverse pattern that marks most exchanges of violence in contemporary cinema (and especially those that involve the unilateral commission and undefended reception of a violent act), ultimately framing violence not only within but *as* a dialogic, if still fundamentally unequal, exchange. The conventional pattern for such scenes is elegantly simple: A (Protagonist), B (Other), A, C (Instrument, presented or used), B2 (Effect of C on B), A2 (Return to Protagonist). In essence and in the simplest terms, this is a *harmonic* paradigm, the structure the same as to be found in any pop song, and by this equally consumable and non-threatening. Coordinate with the equalizing dialogism at the core of the basic shot-reverse pattern (and, to be sure, retaining all of its interpellative force and integral violence), the implicit harmony in the construction also tends toward a sense of equity, balance, and holistic resolution necessary for the justification of the violence at the center of the encounter as both resolving and proportionate.

The iconic episode opening Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* exemplifies, and in many ways has become the canonical model for, relations between cinematic subjects that are expressly predicated on violence.[80] The scene is set simply: Detective Harry Callahan, simply trying to eat a hot dog in a corner diner, finds this good and simple act of local patronage and consumption interrupted by an alarm ringing out from the bank across the street. Robbers emerge, and anticipating the law's late arrival, Callahan gives chase to intervene: some escape, some are killed, and one is left behind alive. What follows – the infamous "Feeling lucky, punk?" episode – is a paradigmatic exchange which, in its clichéd formalism and thematic-figural allusions, encapsulates and exemplifies this cinema's modus operandi in negotiating violence on the side of an always-contested bourgeois sovereign right. For all its notoriety, there is nothing formally remarkable about the sequence, and that is precisely what makes it so remarkable: cutting between Callahan and his quarry, it is simply an extension of the harmonic pattern described above, and while the socio-cultural context and ideological parameters of the sequence are specific to the conspiratorial and disaffected moment in which the film emerged to great success, the scene's external-episodic and internal-dialogic formal patterns trace back to a language that by this point is thought quite outside of such demands, as a motivated cliché that itself stands for a facticity of relations.

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[80] The episodic quality of this sequence as something of a long-form thematic establishing shot owes to the tradition established in the James Bond films a decade before: the fully-encapsulated pre-credit sequence that has no narratological function beyond establishing (and, in its repetition in opening each film in the series, reestablishing) the general expectations for the film to come (a series of like episodes) and the sovereign insularity of the protagonist's actions. As such, in Philip French's reckoning, "the introductory episode in *Goldfinger* [the third film in the Bond series, and regarded as the most emblematic] is wholly gratuitous – it exists as a film in its own right and its only function is to excite and amuse, to establish a mood." ("Violence in the Cinema," 66. Brackets mine.) Of course, this "wholly gratuitous" quality is qualifiable.

As an encapsulated episode, this sequence can be most broadly understood vis-à-vis Deleuze's concept of the "action-image," particularly in terms of its commodity character vis-à-vis the closed episode-event. This character holds true for this sequence as well, which in its explicit figurations all the more opens up on qualities of naturalization and relational dynamics that are also crucial to the concept of the action-image as a relational constellation, a discrete set of movements between situation and action. Deleuze makes a distinction (though a purely provisional and nominal one) between two basic action-image formations: the large-form SAS (situation-action-situation) and the small-form ASA (action-situation-action), which most often find their forms in SAS' (returning to a modified situation from an action which interrupts a primary situation) and ASA' (a new action, generally equivalent with the first, arising from a situation precipitated by a primary action). Because of the demands of narrative film upon situations and the characters they entail – both of these latter, taken together as their own set, must be in constant movement, transformation, and progression – the action-images in Hollywood cinema, and especially in terms of episodic scenarization and unfolding, tend towards these latter forms.

In Deleuze's formulation, SAS' is an organic and teleologically expansive spiral, corresponding most closely to characters or narrative agents faced with an event or action that changes their situation slightly, propelling them forward to a new SAS' set, constituting and progressing through what Deleuze calls "derived milieu": scenically situational situations shot through with intrinsic (scene-level) and extrinsic (plot-level) demands. While the former demands are "purely situational" – in our terms, specific to the relations established within the episode-segment itself – the latter demands can be understood by the totality of relational elements at play in the movement of the narrative: forces of characters on characters, the development of plot, and the resultant, often cliché, situations which arise, most recognizably as "plot points" where situations are disturbed and give way to the necessity for a restabilizing or transformative action. In this movement from situation to action,

> derived milieux assert their independence and start to become valid for themselves. Qualities and powers are no longer displayed in any-space-whatevers, no longer inhabit originary worlds, but are actualized directly in determinate, geographical, historical and social space-times. Affects and impulses now only appear as embodied in behaviour, in the form of emotions or passions which order or disorder it. This is Realism.[81]

At the same time, the situationality *of* the situation sets it apart from the even consistency of the characters' world, as a pressing disruption or destabilization, if not as an event per se:

> The milieu and its forces incurve on themselves, they act on the character, throw him a challenge, and constitute a situation in which he is caught. The character reacts in his turn (action properly speaking) so as to respond to the situation, to modify the milieu, or his relation with the milieu, with the situation, with other characters. He must acquire a new mode of being (*habitus*) or raise his mode of being to the demands of the milieu and of the situation. Out of this emerges a restored or modified situation, a new situation. Everything is individuated: the milieu as a particular space-time, the situation as determining and determinate, the collective as well as the individual character."[82]

This movement, necessarily, requires a conflict at its center (action as action against an/other, action as violence against the threat of violence, etc.), a conflict that, while it must be both intensively and extensively resolved, is also, in the case of SAS' and ASA' formations, *serial and perpetual, potentially without end*: "The action itself is a duel of forces, a series of duels: duels with the milieu, with the others, with itself."[83] Against, organizing, and extending this state of perpetual conflict, Deleuze says,

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[81] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 141.

[82] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 141-142. As Deleuze notes in a series of "laws" governing the organic developmental logic of the action-image, "there is necessarily a *big gap* between the encompasser and the hero, the milieu and the behaviour that modifies it, situation and action, which can only be bridged progressively, throughout the length of the film," (154) and ultimately that "*there must be a big gap between the situation and the action to come, but this gap only exists to be filled*, by a process marked by caesuras, as so many retrogressions and progressions." (155; emphases his)

> (t)he great organic representation, SAS', must not only be composed, but engendered: on the one hand, the situation must permeate the character deeply and continuously, and on the other hand the character who is thus permeated must burst into action, at discontinuous intervals. This is the formula of realist violence, completely different from naturalist violence.[84]

By these terms, then, the destruction of "Paris" in *Armageddon* is essentially a closed circle: while it operates simultaneously within large-form of SAS' (vis-à-vis the movement of the narrative, supplying the urgency of plot progression) and the small form of ASA' (vis-à-vis the structure of the narrative as the pretext for the progression of increasingly spectacular episodes), it *intrinsically* follows the logic SAS: the situation and destruction of an essentially empty space, the destruction, ultimately, of no space at all, of no one at all, the focus being on the destruction/action/violence in, of, and as itself. As such, it is not only relatively self-contained ("as episode"), but also, in coordination with the other emptyings at play that allow the destruction itself to be the only point of the scene, reduced to a *purely* consumable moment, constituting a scene-space without any ethical, political, figurative, or affective force or implication save for the dazzling pleasure of the display. In this, it also inhabits the logic of the small form ASA': "a representation like this," Deleuze explains,

> is no longer global but local. It is no longer spiral but elliptical. It is no longer structural but constructed round events [*événementielle*]. It is no longer ethical, but comedic (we say 'comedic,' because this representation gives rise to a comedy, although it is not necessarily comic, and may be dramatic).[85]

In the concatenation of the SAS and ASA forms present here, the episode functions as both a discrete consumable unit and part of continuing narrative motivation/movement, every action/event setting the stage for another, and in this relative closure of episodes and their events reinflects in its own way the structure of permanent crisis proper to late capitalism and its proper subject.

The presence of individuated narrative agents in this equation both complicates and completes this scenario. Indeed, the movement of the SAS' formation – its propulsive spirality extending the episode's perfectly closed circularity – all but demands the presence of such agents as a motivating, unifying, and indeed justificatory force. For as Deleuze notes, "If one remains at this first approximation, one is in an SAS structure which has become cosmic or epic – the hero becomes equal to the milieu via the intermediary of the community, and does not modify the milieu, but re-established cyclic order in it."[86] This would *appear* to be the case in *Dirty Harry*'s opening sequence, which establishes but does not transform the milieu in his contestatory encounter with "the community" (the forces of law and underclass that threaten him and which he is able and authorized to bring under control, if temporarily). On the surface, this exchange follows a simple narrative logic of Situation-Complication-Resolution, a circularity whereby a self-contained state (here, Harry's "otherwise normal day") is interrupted but resolved in a return to the original state ("all in a day's work: now, back to lunch"): the SAS structure episodically corresponding, in Marxian terms, to the equivalence in exchange expressed in the commodity circulation-form CMC (where the commodity is the "situation" or territorializing fixing of capital for the use-value of consumption, and its deterritorialized translation into money something of a disturbance of that fixity). As such, it stands on its own cyclical terms (and, per Debord's aphorism that "(c)onsumable pseudo-cyclical time is the time of the spectacle: in the narrow sense, as the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and, in the broadest sense, as the image of the consumption of time,"[87] terms that are purely reified, "cosmic and epic").

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[83] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 142.

[84] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 155.

[85] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 160. Brackets translators'.

But underneath this pattern's outward symmetricality lies a dissymmetrical, tricked, impossible exchange, inasmuch as the SAS' formation – like the capital circulation-form MCM (wherein the commodity at the center of the set – here, the action/event – is the hub by which value is inequitably accrued) – produces a surplus of value. Insofar as the formal pattern produces a certain surplus of power in the interest of the subject-image A, there is internal, structuring dissymmetry; insofar as the spectator equivocates the satisfaction granted for his/her investment of time and money (so much plenty, so early in the film!) with the apparently righteous resolution of the on-screen situation, s/he is tricked (and gladly, mendaciously welcomes this); insofar as both processes entail a surrender to the terms of symbolic enunciation and debt, the image establishes an insolubly inequitable, impossible exchange. There are thus two exchanges, equally unequal and certainly related, operative here: and between subject and other within the scene (monological but presented as and transformed into dialogue) and the worker-spectator's engagement with the scene-commodity which operates under the same image and logic. The simple shot-reverse structure organizing such exchanges echoes the interpellative subjection to the law-qua-symbolic order described by Silverman, and moreover the literalist figurations her illustration from *Psycho* entails: the "guilty subject," mute in the face of the force of law and compelled, if not to answer, then to submit and respond to it. The violence of the scene – the imminent and immanent violence of the situation yet to be actualized and finalized, and ultimately the violence of alternately positioning the spectator at both its point of justified origination and its "receiving end"– is sublimated into the structure of a dialogue, a dialectic that in itself diffuses and defuses the totalitarian face of the force to which the always-already guilty spectatorial subject is perpetually under threat.[88] Beyond the more overt narratological mechanics of figuration and wish-fulfillment at stake, within the boundaries of the encounter with the other – an encounter that, empirically violent of not, by rights is always-already something of an event – a very specific economy of violence is established wherein the bourgeois-cinematic subject strikes something of an implicit deal in accepting the terms of the exchange at stake, enters into a balance between violences to which one must be necessarily subject, exchanging one (recognizing in oneself the status of being-subject-to and being-complicit-with institutional and structural violence) for another (the surrender to defining, alienating, external forces of enunciation and supplementation).

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[86] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 146.
[87] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 112.

The commodity character of this sequence, coupled and coordinate with its internal relational-dialogic structure, permits an exemption of this encounter from a sustained interrogation of its outwardly and intrinsically fascistic politicality and, moreover, from even the ethical imperatives introduced in the presence of and encounter with the other.[89] On the one hand, the totality of the signifiers at stake – prostrated, street-clothed black thief, defiant yet impotent in the face of the upstanding, suit-clad white figure of the law; the intellectual cunning of reason (the verbal shell-game: "six shots or five?") itself used as a weapon against the criminal element which cannot contend with or counter this rationality, much less play the odds that could never be in his favor anyway; the basic spatial composition of the *mise-en-scène*, with the conqueror looming above his quarry, as in nineteenth-century imperialist trophy photos – constitutes a scene that is overdetermined and saturated to the point of semiological overload. The dialogic, shot/reverse construction of the exchange does more than enough to counter this, economically casting the monological exercise of power and threat of violence as negotiation and civil discourse. Moreover, in localizing the exchange as an *individuated* intersubjective encounter – not between totalitarian power on the one side and its other on the other, but rather, as in the Western duel, between two *contestants*, each with everything and nothing to lose, each equivocated in the potential to enact an equalizing violence – the violence of the threat is disassociated from Callahan as figure, face, and force of law and reinscribed as the frustrated (but supremely confident) expression of Callahan as the generalized ideality of the bourgeois subject, defending against and containing its other, its *competitor* (if not, given the providentiality of this favored subject's right, its proper *rival*). The nominal equity implicit in this rivalry further depoliticizes the sequence's more problematic connotations, from race to class to Callahan's fascistic will to power, and reframes it within the terms of a conspiratorial struggle for the right to force and power in the decadence of the social contract.

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[88] The key difference between the Officer/Marion encounter and the Callahan/hoodlum encounter is that in the case of the latter, the threat of force is overtly literalized, manifestly concetized, and literally foregrounded in the image of the gun to which the "dialogue" takes a relatively secondary position. Certainly, this is directly of a piece with Arendt's claims to the instrumental thought of violence in late capitalism and previously noted essential/totalitarian monologisms that frame the concept itself, and will be further discussed along these lines, and in its own right, in the next chapter.

[89] Which is not to say that the SAS' paradigm is without its own ethos, and a crucial one that bears on both the afore-discussed "ethics of immanence" and the means by which the ethical imperative is itself subject to politicized reinflections and reconfigurations. As Deleuze remarks in a reading of King Vidor's (decidedly less fascistic) social-realist films, the movement "from the collectivity [the community, the milieu] to the individual

Just as importantly, this conspiratorial rivalry is also framed from the side of law. Throughout the film, Callahan constitutes a problem for their operations precisely because he crosses the line into their proprietary uses and justifications of force – in other words, he's moving in on their business, introducing competition into the monopolistic economy, offering a better, more effective product: a theme as old as the Western antihero, and

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[who in relation to it must adopt a certain habitus or mode of being] and from the individual to the collectivity … can be called 'ethical'. Moreover it imposes itself in every genre, inasmuch as the ethos designates simultaneously the location or the milieu, the stay in a milieu [the question of the *tourist* enters here as well], and the habit or the habitus, the mode of being. This ethical or realist form, far from excluding the dream, embraces the two poles of the American Dream: on the one hand the idea of unanimist community or of a nation-milieu, melting pot and fusion of all minorities … on the other hand the idea of a leader, that is, a man of this nation who knows how to respond to the challenges of the milieu as to the difficulties of a situation." (*Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 144; brackets mine) continued in the tradition of both vigilante films and superhero stories. The postscript of the opening sequence – a shot where Callahan nonchalantly crosses the street now saturated with police prowlers and uniformed officers moving in to make the arrest[90] – cements these separations and points of contact: the law moves independently of Callahan, and he of it, despite his complicity and intimacy with its maintenance; his force thus becomes emblematic, ideological, symbolic – the uniformed officers thus material, repressive, but effective only insofar as the first, preemptive containment has been made.

Callahan, then – in this sequence, and across the subsequent sequences of his willful assertion of power that episodically structure the film – is within the infinitely corrupted city-space a figure of the *relatively autonomous but absolutely necessary and cooperative bourgeois vigilance* against the criminality of violence – indeed, to return to the Code's implicit messages, *the violence of the fact of criminality* – in the face of the inadequacy, even ineptitude, of the law as bureaucratized institutional force. And in accepting Callahan as a neo-bourgeois ego-ideal, the viewing subject is positioned as the vigilante without action, with vigilance alone as the sufficient condition of complicity with the mechanics of the law, watchful observance distanced from but critical to the enactment of force of law. What ultimately emerges from these potentially contradictory layers is less a critique of the wholesale failure of the law – its symbolic and material collapse, its ineffectuality and even illogicity when adapted to a (here parodized) liberal-left model of equitable, reformative, and ideally forceless justice – than a celebration of the necessity bourgeois internalization, mobilization, and crucial stakes in the enforcement and reinforcement of that law: in the end, Callahan relinquishes his badge to the sea but not his gun, and, not unlike Bonnie and Clyde or Paul Kersey, emerges as a venture capitalist of violence, a spectral tourist-cum-superman far less on the side of Justice as universal equity than of Hammurabic self-preservation and the reversion to an insular, protective, and democratic social order lost in the law's relative absence.

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[90] Purely formal parameters to the side, I would argue that this is *not* the "concluding" shot of the episode, which in fact is the payoff moment of the affective punchline marking the criminal's defeat: Callahan's smirk as the criminal (and his expression) collapse in defeat, the decisive moment of value accrued, the " ' " in SAS'. Nonetheless, it is essential to the scene insofar as it opens the space, as Callahan moves from background to foreground to out of field, for another episode to come, one which by necessity promises to best the initial episode, however iconographic and "untoppable" it indeed is.

The persistent, consistent, and indeed *insistent* return to the face of the protagonist in the above constructions comprises the final field of justification for whatever moral/ethical problematics that might still linger. This justification is actualized by the general role of the face in this cinema as a point of idealized identification, and moreover in the affects that face registers in the face of violence, committed by others or in the name of preserving the self. Even in the "productivity" of the episode, in its hermetic economy, the resolution of asymmetries upon and within the face of the actor in question is absolutely necessary as the final field and space of justification for the enactment (and, in the case of the spectator, the complicit witnessing) of violence. The concrete and singular unity of the face is paramount in narrative cinematic discourse, as a point of both departure and return, of justification and resolve, of interpellation and identification. As Deleuze notes,

> Ordinarily, three roles of the face are recognisable: it is individuating (it distinguishes or characterises each person); it is socialising (it manifest [sic] a social role); it is relational or communicating (it ensures not only communication between two people, but also, in a single person, the internal agreement between his character and his role).[91]

In each of these three roles, the face in cinema is *iconic*: it is the expression of either a power (a passionate, intensive sensation, as love or hate, that is unequivocated and unambiguous) or a quality (a thoughtful, reflexive reflection, as admiration or inquisitivity, which opens on the indeterminate and speculative), and the expressed power or quality is indistinct from what expresses it – that is, *the face is indistinguishable from its expression*, and this is what constitutes its singular force. For Deleuze, the focus on the face in the close-up disconnects the face from its bodily mooring (i.e., the head as part of a body) and pushes it into (which is also to say, returns it to) the realm of pure expressivity as an *affection-image*: "power or quality considered for themselves, as expresseds."[92] For Bela Balázs (and for Deleuze, who offers the following passage as a referent for his own discourse on the face), the close-up's power is that it extracts its object, the face, from all spatial relations and settings previously established: its power, in other words, is in its unequivocated spacelessness and timelessness, a quality that lends itself as much to affirmative functions as not. As Balázs says,

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[91] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 99. Brackets mine. For Deleuze, however, the close-up also threatens to destroy these three functions, makes the face phantasmal and vampiric, even inhuman, sublime; this is the face-landscape of Leone and Peckinpah, and also, in its own way, the face of justice itself as a pure function, disengaged from any particular application, the sublime unity of form beyond individuation and differentiation, beyond even form itself. As he says, "(t)he close-up (pushes) the face to those regions where the principle of individuation ceases to hold sway. They are not identical because they resemble each other, but because they have lost individuation no less than socialisation and communication. This is the operation of the close-up. The close-up does not divide one individual, any more than it reunites two: it suspends individuation. Then the single and ravaged face unites a part of one to a part of the other. At this point it no longer reflects nor feels anything, but merely experiences a mute fear. It absorbs two beings, and absorbs them in the void. And in the void it is itself the photogramme which burns, with Fear as its only affect. The facial close-up is both the face and its effacement." (*Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 100)

> (t)he expression of an isolated face is a whole which is intelligible by itself. We have nothing to add to it by thought, nor have we anything to add to that which is of space or time. When a face that we have just seen in the middle of a crowd in detached from its surroundings, put into relief, it is as if we were suddenly face to face with it. Or furthermore if we have seen it before in a large room, we will no longer think of this when we scrutinise the face in close-up. For the expression of a face and the signification of this expression have no relation or connection with space. Faced with an isolated face, we do not perceive space. Our sensation of space is abolished. A dimension of another order is opened to us.[93]

Because the face, *qua visage*, so powerfully and singularly expresses affects of power and quality, the quality of the reactions upon the face of the agents involved is critical in situating, reconciling, and justifying violence within the ideological economy of the film's diegetic space, as another measure in deflecting and re-solving whatever ethical or affective dissonance that may emerge in the spectator's witnessing/consumption of the commission of a violent act (an act of consumption that, as I have argued in the previous chapter, is complicit, to the point of becoming coterminous, with that commission). As both a directive cue and encapsulated statement of sovereign right, the affects registered in the final return to the face of the vanquishing protagonist must inevitably be one of resolve and strength – never fear or doubt, and certainly not regret. Such a registered resolve counters the requisite tenet of the force of violence, *the ability to be affected*, in such a way as to both buttress the separation from the effects of violence (including the violences entailed in the spectator-cinema dyad) and foreclose further reflection (the basic task complete, the effects now someone else's problem): the resolved and determined face is an expression of unqualified power, not of qualified or qualifying reflection, of the ability to affect and to have affected rather than in the position of being or having been affected.

Every episode that resolves on the face of the actor-agent, then, involves a layered, tripled resolution. First, the episode is formally resolved, returning to its origin: its hermetic narrative at once sealed (the act, as an expression of the agent, completed and returned to him) and opening up on the promise of yet another episode-act to come – even if after a "breather" in which exposition and the mechanics of plot are allowed once again to intervene and take their organizing, synthesizing effect, in the systolic/diastolic "dialectic between spectacle and narrative"[94] Tom Gunning has noted as characteristic of a cinema of attractions – within larger, interlocking, and coordinated formal patterns of return which comprise the ideality of aesthetic good form, the commodity-form, and ipseic subjective holism alike. Second, and coextensive with the first, the resettlement on the image *of* the face – stable in its composition, symbolic in its reassuring identification, iconic in its transcendence of the scene's spatio-temporal coordinates – resolves and even dissolves whatever ethical-political dissonance that may have been introduced by the act in itself, reconciling it "from within and without" on the side and in the field of justice (and what cause more just, in the end, than to move the story forward towards its own inexorable resolution?). And third is the more literal resolution, the polyvalent clarity, of the face itself *as* face, powerfully defined and hyperrealistically larger than life in the frame, its intensified ethico-interpellative force matched and amplified by the ethical and agential resolve of the expression *on* the face, be it in exhausted satisfaction ("a job well-done": the task completed) or grim stoicism ("this had to be done": ends justifying means absolutely and absolvingly).

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[92] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 97.

[93] Balázs, "Le Cinéma," 57. Cited in Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 96.

In these cut-ins to close-ups that disrupt the objective presentation of the act as act, we can recognize a further parceling out of proprietary violence that, in these intensified and all-exclusory spatial-individual subsegmentations, most immediately and decisively reconstitutes the structuring categories of victim and victimizer, empowered and disempowered. This, of course, can cut both ways: we clearly see such segmentations on the side of the empowered bourgeois protagonist in *Dirty Harry* and *Die Hard*, each structurally emblematic of the dialogic politics of necessarily unequal exchange in preemptive-defensive (hence socially sanctioned and productive) violent encounters. The obverse of this segmentation, though ultimately to the same conspiratorial-oppositional ends as in any violent sequence, is equally important to recognize and reinforce the recognition of the threat posed by the other, not as a general diffused category (per the logic of Cold War spectral violence) but in realized and localized agents. The rape of Bobby (Ned Beatty) in

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[94] Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," 61.

John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972) is instructive in this regard: the undeveloped space of wild nature overrun by miscreant cretins, fully outside and encompassing the categorical other of bourgeois civilization, has already been established from the film's first frames, as has the intrinsic conflict of the bourgeois tourists with their grotesque parodies, the hillbillies. The rape sequence is notable as much for all of the affective-semiotic baggage it carries (the multiple registers of violation and violability, braided into the fabric of the thought of gender and class) as it is in how it formally parses and diffuses the relations of power inherent in the intimacy of the act by way of interruptive reaction shots, as it cuts in from a peremptory situation of impending attack to extreme close-ups on the faces of the victim (shot from above, low in frame and weeping with face ground into the dirt) and perpetrator (shot from below, high in frame and sneering below the forest's dingy canopy). Against this stock formal-semiological convention of differential framing, we also have a conceptual and literally scenarized inversion of the symbolic above/below relations of power, an image of "nature" raping those who have raped it, forcing the tourist out of its element less to repent sins of omission and commission than to renounce the force of will, struggle, and resistance: a renunciation of *the human*, (re)turning man to beast ("squeal like a pig!"), reducing the bourgeois victim to bare life. Yet the focus on the faces in the shot/reverse structure mediates this, returning both agents to humanity, while at the same time signaling the anxiety of the vengeant and violent return of the (socioeconomically and psychoaffectively) repressed.

To an extent, one could (and perhaps cannot help but) *imagine* the scene without these interruptions, objectively recorded from the distanced, monocular, static perspective with which the scene began – one dispassionately registered as mere fact of action, the action recorded and presented "as fact" and without any interruptive formal-affective intervention or cues to mediate the act of witnessing by foregrounding familiar artifices, one confronting the viewer with the scene as scenario open to at least some degree of free ideation or independent synthesis.[95] Certainly, there are a number of contemporary examples of violent encounters which are played out uninterrupted, though true to form also, certainly, only to the extent that the victimizer (and often also the victim) is already negatively coded as other: young mafioso Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) pistolwhipping an alleged date-rapist in Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990) and the previously noted scenes of domestic violence in *Raging Bull*, the rape of Mrs. Alexander (Adrienne Corri) accompanied by a sneering rendition of "Singin' in the Rain" in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and the SS execution of Krakow ghetto residents in Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) come immediately to mind as expressly uncomfortable moments sustained without the regularity of comfortable retreats to the atrocities' (fictional) witness, unpleasurable in their purely *aut-opsorial* quality. But despite the criminogeneity that marks these scene-spaces and nominally permits the unblinking quality of their capture, when played out uninterrupted or as observed from a mechanically dispassionate objective distance such "direct presentations" also run all kinds of risks of revealing complicity to consciousness through the mere act of passive and sustained viewing (a proposition I have made in Chapter Two), and consequently *must* be brought back to an identificatory and autotelically justifying field. And ultimately, even in all of these examples just noted, there *is* such a return, all the more welcome – and affectively potent – for its deferral: to the face of the seduced and soon-to-be-doomed-by-fate Karen Hill (Lorraine Bracco) in *Goodfellas*, to the face of the beleaguered Joey LaMotta (Joe Pesci) in *Raging Bull*, to the terrified face of Mr. Alexander (Patrick Magee) in *A Clockwork Orange*, to the mute horror of Oskar and Emilie Schindler (Liam Neeson and Caroline Goodall) in *Schindler's List*.

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[95] In Gaspar Noe's *Irreversible* (2002), the necessity for the segmentation of a violent act into an equalizing balance between objective and subjective, intimacy and distance, is laid particularly bare in the presentation of a nearly nine-minute rape scene, from start to finish, unbroken temporally in the duration of the act and perspectivally/spatially in a sustained long-shot. The sequence is quite simply unbearable to watch, offering no respite, alterity of perspective, any aestheticizing maneuvers whatsoever. Its snuff-vérité formalism, marked precisely by the concerted lack of any formal intervention, any impulse to intervene in the scenario and

In each of these cases, the reaction shots are not only crucial for affective supplementation or direction, but also, as fields of absolution and justification, as the sites upon which "the affects of production" are both registered for reproduction and productively resolved, in *legitimizing the scene as such.* Counteracting the kind of gratuitous sadism (of the act itself, of the film-text in presenting it) that would evoke in the viewer its counterpart of pure and purely unpleasurable masochism (always a dangerous proposition),

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transform the act represented into any but "what it is," constitutes a specific sadism that can be understood more objectively (that is, apart from the revulsion that such an act, in itself, undeniably brings forth): the force of the camera's denial of averting its gaze, its cold mechanicality foregrounded to the point of utter subjective alienation, the singularity of its perspective, which the viewer has no choice but to substitute for its own, on display *as* inherently sadistic, as *unwilling but not unable* to cater to the demands of its subject, forcing the viewer to supply its own cut-aways in the act of looking away, attempting to deny the scene presented attention, looking back only to be sure it's not yet over, ending so that the film can continue beyond this unwelcomed intrusion.

the inserts of the faces serve to break apart both the space and the action therein into recognizable and reassuring segmentations and stratifications, sublating the violence of the re/presented as the latter is representationally ablated from the scene. This is particularly pronounced in *Deliverance*, where the violence of the act, and indeed the act itself, ultimately and crucially becomes absent from the scene it structures: apart from the establishing and concluding wide shots that frame the action in the scene, the act in commission is played out exclusively upon the faces of the rapist and the raped, pushed out of field, and revealed in this way to be secondary to the scene's primary function of registering violence within a generalized intersubjective sphere of relations, where the essential (and essentially Darwinian) competition structuring those relations always and inexorably threatens to descend (or perhaps ascend) into aggressive domination and the assertion of violent force. The abject horror of the scene is consequently didactically narrativized into a legible allegory of class contestation, and one all the more powerful in that regard for the affective force of the faces that dominate the screen.

We can understand the importance of the reaction shot that resolves on the side of power just as clearly in its opposite – in faces which register not an unaffected resolve in the wake of the violence they have committed, but the reverse, in the qualities of fear, terror, or revulsion in the face of one's own actions. This is quite distinct, however, from the reaction to violence committed by others, as in coming upon the scene of a crime, or the mute terror of witnessing that which cannot be reacted against. For the most part, whenever affects of revulsion or shock are registered on the face, it is to the end of a conventional transference of affective (and even ethical/moral) reaction, a simple guided response to the event or act that, as we have already briefly noted in the case of Dallas' death in *Alien*, can even substitute for the actual presentation of that event. While the effects of Hannibal Lecter's attack upon his nurse in *The Silence of the Lambs* are curtly and obliquely described by Dr. Chilton, and while we never see those effects directly, we witness the horror of Clarice Starling's reaction to an image of it, in an extended close-up, and react in kind to its atrocity.[96] Likewise, in

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[96] Also noteworthy is how relatively uninteresting this is when seen in action, as is the case in Ridley Scott's 2001 sequel, *Hannibal*, where the attack *is* presented from the perspective of surveillance camera. The effect upon the victim, however, is still not explicitly shown: certainly not because this would be too grotesque for the film to present (this is a film, after all, that revels in its baroque grotesqueries to the point that it shows, in explicit detail, a man feeding shreds of his own face to dogs, the same man becoming a feast for carnivorous boars, and finally another man being fed his own sautéed prefrontal lobe), but more likely because the image

Steven Soderbergh's (appropriately titled) *Out of Sight* (1998), an entire scene of savage murder is not represented but registered on the face of a witness to the event, in a brutal montage of reaction shots that range from numb shock to utter breakdown into disbelieving tears and mute, shuddering screams. And while in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1996) we see Bunny (Kevin Dillon) thrusting the butt of his rifle downwards toward the head of a prostrate Vietnamese villager, the impacts are not seen, nor are the effects thereof: in place and at the moment of each blow, we are shown disbelieving reactions and faces turning away in an equally affective and ethical cue to do the same.

While such mediations, and even full displacements, of visualized acts and effects with shots registering appropriate affects can often be understood as a decision made to ends affectively manipulative (the scene unshown more terrifying by dint of its not being shown) or strategically pragmatic (the scene presumed to be unshowable by the capricious codes of presentability), the insertion of such reaction shots is just as often a compulsory submission to the industry's affirmative-moral mandates of regulation. In what is perhaps the most formally and empirically violent episode in David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), the reactions of the crowd intercut with the Narrator's (Edward Norton) brutal beating of Angel (Jared Leto) – turning from ecstatic rapture to averted, horrified eyes – were quantitatively increased and qualitatively enhanced by the demand of the studio (20th Century Fox) and the ratings board, who argued that the scene, as initially presented, was not horrifying *enough* (in terms of unambiguously framing the beating *as* a horrifying event). The resultant episode is now, paradoxically enough, both more horrifying *and* more palatable than in its initial form: the terms by which the episode is to be apprehended are made rationally and affectively unambiguous.

In this, the reaction of Sam Lowry (Jonathan Pryce), the "hero" of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1984), in the conclusion of his fiery escape from the Ministry of Information mobile police is instructively subversive. The sequence unfolds quite conventionally vis-à-vis the standard editing of any given chase scene, cutting between interiors of Jill's (Kim Griest's)

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lingering in the collective imagination of the audience could never be adequately matched. These problematics – the mobilization of an image itself as an instrument of violence, the denial of presenting the image of violence in act or effect, the violence this itself might enact at the level of spectatorial imagination, and the ways in which these kinds of *enregistrements* operate in an affective register similar to that described by Deleuze in his reading of Bacon, whose power lies in the fact that in his painting he "[chooses] 'the scream more than the horror,' the violence of sensation more than the violence of the spectacle" (*Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, 52) – are attended in slightly different and certainly more comprehensive ways throughout the next chapter.

truck (spatially isolating the protagonists and their conversation to highlight the personal urgency of their escape), exteriors of Jill's truck (denotatively demonstrating the speed, recklessness, and immanent danger of that escape, dodged obstacles and near-collisions abounding), and exteriors revealing the pursuing vehicle (both proof of the threat's presence and its increasing proximity). When Sam dumps Jill's cargo (a prefabricated home) in the path of the pursuing police transport, a similarly conventional concluding shot pattern ensues: the vehicle crashes into obstacle and explodes in a wide shot, the moment of impact is repeated from a number of other, wider angles to emphasize and redouble the spectacularity of the explosion, and a final wide shot of the flaming rubble seals the final defeat of the enemy (the consumptive moment: the conventionally encapsulated movement of the three-act death).

In the compulsory return to the face of the actor, Sam is seen cheering his victory and the other's defeat. But this scene carries on, in four more shots that collapse the entire conquest and its mytho-conventional trappings: the driver of the police car, a human form, stumbling and wrapped in flames, emerges from the fire; Sam's face retreats from joy, registering startlement and shock; the policeman, weakly and pathetically flailing, collapses (dead or soon slowly and agonizingly so); Sam, likewise deflated, turns away, sinking into his seat and mumbling, numb with the consequence of his supposedly heroic, self-preservative action, an action that in its material and affective consequences is so very much unlike the classic Hollywood fare he and his coworkers digest daily in a far more important labor than that for which their employer pays them (the product of his escape from and protest against the alienating conditions of work has backfired, and terribly so). In this sequence, Gilliam effectively inverts and implodes the consumptive-spectatorial relation to the implicitly justified violence of a cinematic protagonist, moving beyond the immediate and immediately gratifying spectacularity of ends to a fuller (if no less didactic) recognition of effects, complicity, and debt.

What Gilliam includes in this sequence is what, by necessity for the insularity of the episode, indeed by necessity for the very consumptive and productive engagement with the film-text, is almost categorically excluded: the costs and consequences of the production and consumption of the commodity, not only in terms of the invisible labor invested therein, but in the aftereffects thereof. By this overriding logic, in any cinematically presented act of violence, spectacular or intimate, there is always the problem of the *remainder*: the victim, or what is left of the victim after the violence has taken place (if anything at all, which is why explosions of whatever scale – a car, an entire city, the world itself – are so handy in this regard), the unthought but lingering material effects and relational consequences of violence "in fact," up to and including the unthinkability of death itself. These effects, and perhaps especially the figures of the dead, must *disappear*, and the necessity of this sublimation into the ether opens up on questions of what these figures represent, and what the preferred and proffered relations thereto entail, before and after the fact of violence. And it is in this final field of figural and formal exclusion that the thought of class, sovereignty, space, and consumption – and what each presupposes and demands – all come back together.

THE ABJECT REMAINDER:
OUT OF FRAME, OUT OF FIELD, OUT OF MIND

> *The struggle against the state ... is all the more implacable, because this is a state that nullifies all real contents but that – all empty declarations about the sacredness of life and about human rights aside – would also declare any being radically lacking a representable identity to be simply nonexistent.*[97]
>
> Giorgio Agamben
> "Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*"

> *For mass consumption, our culture has a message which, if anything, devalues or dilutes the dream of eternal life; and this through exorcising the horror of death.*[98]
>
> Zygmunt Bauman
> *Postmodernity and its Discontents*

> *Death is un-American. It is an affront to the American Dream.*
>
> Alfred Toynbee

If the preconditions for a bourgeois relation to violence are rooted in a general unconsciousness of process and effects, it should come as no great surprise, in the end, that the most singularly American mechanisms of cinematically rendering the violent consist in the concerted absence or relative insignificance of a reverse angle (relative to the protagonist/"perpetrator") which reveals the effects of any given violent act. French director Bertrand Tavernier describes this contemporary idiosyncrasy in the simplest terms:

> It's not only a matter of the violence, it's a matter of the result – of the reverse shot. Now, in many films you don't have the reverse shot on the people who are subjected to violence. In one John Woo film, a woman is thrown from a plane. Okay, it's an incredible, beautiful shot. Exciting. But where is the effect of her death? Where is the body of the woman? Raoul Walsh or Sam Peckinpah would have had a shot to show it's a woman who was killed. In today's films, there's a lack of reaction shots.[99]

Obviously, what Tavernier is referring to here is not the kind of "reaction shot" that we have just discussed (though it is related to it); rather, he's concerned with the use of analytical editing to reveal the effects of a violent act: here, the compulsion to invisibly and decisively usher those effects away. In contemporary commercial cinema, it is indeed striking when *any* such lingering attention on the body of the victim – and particularly when said victim is essentially ancillary to the plot – happens at all. In the opening barroom sequence of Peckinpah's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), for example, an unnamed and unidentified woman (in Peckinpah's world, a barfly at best, a prostitute most likely) interrupts the expository conversation between the lawmen and Bennie (Warren Oates) regarding the hunt for the titular character, and for so doing (indeed, as much for interrupting the relay of plot information as the characters' conversation) is suddenly and capriciously knocked unconscious with a sudden, backhanded blow to the face. The men's conversation continues, and they pay no heed to the violence that has just occurred (a relatively minor violence to be sure, in light of both Peckinpah's oeuvre and the venal, violent world already established by his lens) – but the soundtrack and the images do not correspond: while the conversation carries on in the foreground of the soundstage, the camera returns to and remains on the prostrate victim, as she lies still, as the barkeeps struggle to carefully and discreetly lift and drag her out of the bar, as she disappears from the frame, and hence the film, forever.

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[97] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 88.

[98] Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 159.

[99] From an unspecified *Hollywood Reporter* interview; cited in Bouzereau, *Ultraviolent Movies: From Sam Peckinpah to Quentin Tarantino*, 232.

That Peckinpah traces the entire path of victimization and violence here, establishing and maintaining it as a narrative in itself, is notable: while on the one hand it is a constitutive episode that operates within, by, and for the demands of the textual set which includes it, on the other hand the foregrounding of the sequence, the emphasis placed upon it at the expense of the "real action" (the exposition and setting into motion of the narrative) in the narrative – which is now, in a marked reversal, subordinate to what would otherwise be an incidental detail – lays bare not only the dearth of such shots as Tavernier describes, but also the necessity behind such a lack: the effects of violence, and especially those acts of violence integral to a film's plot, are the abject reminders of a process which cannot abide as its end any substantive connection to or meditation on the larger causal constellations beyond the immediate exigencies of plot.

Paradoxically (at least given the purported moral/ethical mandates noted in opening) but unsurprisingly, those scenarizations of violence that lack or subordinate such a reverse shot that, for any *appreciable duration*, shows the effect of the violent act upon its victim, and at times even upon the commissioner of the act, are those that *evade* censure by the MPAA's capricious decisions, whereas those that retain or linger upon these effects are deemed "gratuitous," "(porno)graphic," "disturbing" or "irresponsible." The point here, and it is intuitive enough, is that for the representation of acts of violence to be considered acceptable for a "non-restricted audience," (and even for "mature, adult" audiences) they must disinvest and divorce these acts from any meaningfully registered effect or consciousness of effect, either specific (i.e., what the act does to the body of the victim or victimizer) or general (i.e., the political and material meanings and implications of violence, of the categories of victim and victimizer, or of modes and politics of consumption). While this is admittedly not a particularly striking observation – it is quite nakedly of a piece with the demands of consumer consciousness and the necessary abrogation of the thought of production and consequences – it nonetheless opens a field of considerations concerning the limits of both the appeal and formal representability of violence (a matter to be continued in the next chapter).

The concerted lack of such shots points to a fundamental maxim in contemporary Hollywood cinema that has informed all of our previous discussions and considerations of how such presentations of violence are (and have long been) geared toward the production of an ideal bourgeois worker-spectator: for the violent to be acceptable in contemporary commercial cinema it must be not so much "aestheticized" (in the sense of abstracted from a basic realism of representation, though this is certainly often the case) as ultimately *appetizing* in ways that resonate with what could be considered the "degree-zero" of contemporary bourgeois consumer consciousness: spectacular presentation and pure affective gratification without consequence, completely divorced from the nagging realism and reality of relational effects that would problematize such a pleasure. In short, *it must present itself as an end in itself*, justifying and absolving from consequence its problematically pleasurable means, even foreclosing before the fact the need or demand for any justification whatsoever. This is a problematic that, while transparently rendered in cinema, is certainly not exclusive to it – rather, it is of a piece with the conceptual network that comprises the very condition of possibility for the entire violent imaginary to function, the freedom from consequence as the freedom from debt, from law, from history itself, as the image of pure consumption and the ideality of the sanctified/sovereign bourgeois subject.

Here, too, the strategies are primarily (if not exclusively) formal. In that movement whereby the focus inexorably returns, "full circle," to the subject as actor and perpetrator of violence, the victim is ultimately framed as the remainder of that process, exhausted and thereafter unnecessary. The presence (if not the life) that was negated and all reminders *of* its presence – in short, per writ of *corpus delicti*, *the evidence* – must be swept away: the production of a simulacral agency is the end here, for consumption and without remainder.[100] To be sure, as evidence of power enacted, the effects of violence must be shown, if only fleetingly, to prove the enactment and complete the causal chain of action-effect generally demanded within the holistic logic of narrative cinema. But those effects cannot be registered for too long, nor can they endure beyond the decisive boundaries of the scene or the exigencies of plot: whether the bloodless corpse or the bloody wound, *the embodied effects themselves cannot be allowed to become the sole, central, or lasting focus of the sequence.*

To be more precise: to a certain extent, the effects that an instrument enacts on its victim may be dwelt upon, for the triadic constellation of effect-pleasure-warning to emerge; this is not a matter of "realism" or an excess thereof (there is no frame of reference anyway) in the representation of a given effect, but rather a matter of what all appeals to realism are in the first place: politics. Ultimately, the effect *of* that effect on the body of the victim – screams, suffering, pleading for life, pleading for a quicker death – or upon the entire network of individuals (from family to community to nation) surrounding that individual, cannot endure (save, of course, as an affective or motivating plot device: the murdered terrorist's brother seeks revenge, as in *Die Hard III: With a Vengeance* (1995), the friend of "Nately's Whore" attempting to murder a misrecognized Yossarian in Mike Nichol's adaptation of *Catch-22* (1970), or from the other end of things, the symbolic and oft-repeated trope of the bourgeois tourist discarding a weapon in disgust and "washing hands clean" after a necessary protective or preservative act of violence, such as that closing John Schlesinger's *Marathon Man* (1976)).

* * *

Coordinate with the general and advantageous facelessness of the infinitely killable others that this cinema of quantity revels in, the all-too-familiar treatment of disposable "Red Shirts" and the "dropping dead," reveals the extent to which affording *any* degree of individualism or identity to the victim – a name, a purpose, a family, even the proprietary ownership and personal expression of fear or pain which would individuate and mark them as human in the most general sense – runs the risk of crossing the very line demarcated by the violent imaginary between self and other, and moreover the constitutional tenet that violence requires a notion of the actively self-determined individual (as a singular individuated agent, the only "individual" that matters or that could be defined by these terms) to be understood as such. Those figures upon whom the necessary burden of death must fall are only nominally endowed with identity of any kind, whether as masked troops (as in the faceless stormtroopers of *Star Wars*), deanthropomorphized enemies (as in the eyeless xenomorphs of *Alien* films, the insectoid hordes of *Starship Troopers*, and so forth), or as a generally undifferentiated (and thus categorically proletarianized) *class* of typified and faceless others whom this cinema, and the subjects to which it attends, has never taken adequate steps to represent as *capable or worthy of being individuated in the first place.*

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[100] Contemporary "first-person shooter" games both actualize and hyperbolize this theory: unless the corpse holds something of value for later game-play (a key, a weapon, or some other instrument or clue that will become necessary for the game-narrative to proceed, or as a marker to remind the player that a level has been "cleared" of its requisite quantity of "enemies"), it magically dematerializes, clearing the path so that further movement will not be impeded, so that further battle can occur on the same scene without the obstacles that the slain – now part of the body count "score," if registered at all – occupy.

The strategy for overcoming the potential ethical fissures in the face of what death and violence entail is thus not exclusively spatial or figural but also temporal, by way of characterization and investment in the destruction of the singularized figure of the other. Both *Dirty Harry* and *Die Hard* prove the theorem: in the former, the initial victim from the opening episode is left alive, the importance of his death as an actualization of the capacity to act against the miscreant-class forestalled, so that a more dramatically important victim – the "Scorpio Killer" – can fulfill that function; in the latter, Gruber's figuration as criminal CEO both validates the parceled destruction of his own nameless, soulless corporate drones and emphasizes the importance of his undoing as the decapitation of the other-as-organization. At the same time, the temporal investment in a given figure – already, we have seen, equivocated by Deleuze with economic investment ("the old curse which undermines the cinema: time is money" in "the mutual camera-money exchange"[101]) and by Beller with the worker-spectator's investment of attention-labor – can only be proportionate to the importance of that individual as such, to the importance or lack thereof in the grander scheme of value.

Even in Clint Eastwood's otherwise remarkable elegy for Slotkinian frontier mythology *Unforgiven* (1992), the critical meditation on the image of immediately-gratifying, self-determining and fully insulated violence encapsulated in the canyon shootout sequence succumbs to those autotelic appeals in the very act of focusing upon them as an object of critique. On the one hand, the sequence's real-time and intensively personalized depiction of the anonymous gutshot cowboy's slow death is remarkable in the same way as that of Peckinpah's treatment of the struck woman in *Alfredo Garcia*: the entire chain of consequences for what is normally portrayed as a quick, painless, and (in this cinema at least) unremarkable act of violence is protracted, to a tellingly uncomfortable degree – the stopover is too long, the spectator-tourist demands but is denied a new vista in the unfolding but arrested travelogue. On the other hand, this event serves necessary functions in the greater scheme of the narrative, propelling the subsequent and fully archetypical plot action (the posse set out to find Munny and his band, the capture of Ned, the departure of the Kid, and the final showdown between Munny and Little Bill), as well as (in a parallel track) putting Munny/Eastwood back into contact with doing violence, on the path to his resurrection and return to origins, a road that necessarily culminates in the spectacular shootout which closes the film in a display of astoundingly banal and cliché proportions (Munny singlehandedly, and without so much as a scratch, killing over a dozen undifferentiated men with instantaneously lethal gunshots, and with his nemesis saved "best for last"), after which Munny, iconically square-jawed and stoic, rides off into the moonlight.

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[101] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 77.

With these conditions in place, it has normatively become the case that in nearly every case, in nearly every narrative film that entails violence and death within its movement, the dead themselves are swept away with every cut to another scene, scenario, or space of action, buried singularly or *en masse* in the blink of the camera's eye: faceless, nameless, designed and destined to do nothing but die, born into the diegesis to be sacrificed toward the noblest progressive and affirmative ends, and fully consumed in the process as mere catalysts. These rapturous disappearances, with their multiple sovereign-theocratic overtones, transcendentalize this disposability in ways intimately and immanently connected to the unthought of the neo-bourgeois consumer. This unthought is as much of the economically-necessary division of labor appended to violence as of its contemporary corollary: the absention of the act and fact of death itself from a meaningful place in contemporary experience, concomitant with a *devaluation of death on the whole* that facilitates and authorizes this absention.

Indeed, just as there are precious few commercial films that deal intensively (to say nothing of seriously) with violence thematically or scenically, death – and its figurations in the dead – too is relegated to a conceptual and representational out-of-field. The slowly decaying body that haunts and structures Tim Hunter's independently-produced *River's Edge* (1986), for example, has no place in mass commercial cinema, where its presence would be solely of *forensic interest* (an interest that that film includes but cannily subjugates to its background), an objective and objectified problem to be solved, a plot point for procedural mystery and action rather than the work's symbolic nexus. A single shot from the denouement of De Palma's *Casualties of War* (1989) emblematizes the tendency neatly: after the abrupt death of an unnamed, barely-individuated grunt in midframe, the focus pulls back from the body to the foreground, settling on an argument between the film's central and neatly antagonistic figures (Sean Penn's sociopathic pragmatist and Michael J. Fox's empathetic idealist), the contours of the corpse indistinct as it is blurred into the background, an abject reminder that colors the scene before it but does not intrude on the primary drama.

The lingering, traumatizing, violent effects of death upon the living – the most unacknowledged victims of violence – are also generally incommensurate with this cinema, save as a maudlin means for the living to come to terms with and thereby triumph over death (why else is so much time devoted to so much wringing of hands in funeral scenes in so many films?). In the mode of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, where the present absence of the dead son motivates the dissolution of bourgeois family and all it publicly and privately represents, Todd Field's *In the Bedroom* (2001) proves to be something of an anomaly: subverting and exploiting this general scotoma, the entirety of its narrative movement is structured *around* the fact of violent death, a fact that essentially constitutes the tragedy's entire second and third acts in one brief but fell sequence where what would otherwise be considered the ultimate violence – the killing gunshot, its spectacular and structuring coup de grace – is *not* shown, allowing the violent effects thereof (from the shock of finding the body to the rending-apart of the structure of an otherwise ideal middle-class family and community to the mute entropy of melancholia) to emerge as the film's sole points of focus.

In so many ways, death, as only one of the many ends of violence, has been banalized within and purged from the equation in a cinema organized around the primacy of the episode or sequence-commodity: the death as predication for a joke, the dead as briefly registered quantitative evidence and gratifying signatory of embodied and identified force, as inevitable and necessary "collateral damage," seen and unseen, against which our own pleasure may be mortgaged, pounds upon pounds of flesh demanded for return on our most minimal temporal investment. "Like everything else in modern life," Bauman proposes, "death has been subjected to a division of labor; it has become a 'specialized' concern."[102] The image of death is also subject to this division of labor: certainly in its parceling out into, upon, and as the corpse as *the* image and figure of death, the concrete repository for all its conceptual entailments (death, that is, as a problem not just *of* representation, but *for* representation), and particularly in the labor dedicated to its disappearance and maintaining its absence: every bit a material and metaphysical problem as the violence that produced it, an entire service-sector is dedicated to the corpse's needs (from forensic scientists to morticians to film editors), removing the fact of its burden from those who might be affected by its burden of fact, essentially transforming the very notion of death, and the material body entailed therein, into a commodity within its own, discrete and discreet market, a parallel economy of *waste-disposal.* With the biopolitical banalization of both life and death, each exchangeable and essentially disposable, the market-space of the scene – always a scene of exchanges – indeed opens itself to these commodities, objects to be exhausted in their conversion into spectacular-affective capital, the remainders tossed away so as not to clutter or litter the totality of the display.

This notion of "the disposable dead" and the service infrastructure that attends to them is taken to almost farcical, parodic extremes in *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), where Darth Vader – capriciously executing his underlings for failing to properly do his bidding (and doing so at a distance, "hands clean": bloodlessly strangulating them through "Force of mind," as it were[103]) – has what appears to be an entire service sector in his employ dedicated to pulling his victims' bodies out of sight. That this process happens as an incidental, background event, easily overlooked within the *mise-en-scène*, is certainly not incidental: the maxim against the waste of screen time holds strong as the "real action" carries forth, unconcerned and uninterrupted, in the foreground. Yet even in its brevity and ostensible interest in preserving some measure of realism in the otherwise fantastical diegesis, the fact of the inclusion of the process is noteworthy.[104] These "throwaway moments" – scenes of the disposal of the dead that are themselves essentially disposable in terms of narrative efficacy, extraneous textural additions to scenes where one would never, ever expect them – are in their own way quite savvy, revealing if only for their brief duration something of the unthought mechanics of death, the procedural details necessary if in fact such a scene were true, and that which is usually, as a matter of course, absolutely necessary to avoid visualizing in commercial cinema and the world it organizes alike.

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[102] Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 175.

[103] Vader, like *Se7en*'s John Doe, is in a certain sense a perfect villain for bourgeois identification, more perfect even than *The Silence of the Lambs*' Hannibal Lecter (the fully self-determined figure who, while representing an ideality of human potential, also and despite his taboo culinary tastes exists fully independently of the Law): both commit their violence with hands unbloodied, from a distance, and, in the case of Doe, by making the victim bring violence on him or herself (he creates conditions from which the victim cannot escape, and in which they must undergo violence in the name of his interests, ideals, and project).

But however effective they might be, these maneuvers to exclude death from scene, screen, and consciousness by means of its omnipresent banalization and exclusion from intensive consideration-qua-visualization come a great cost. According to Bauman, this trivialization of death in general – and of the death of others in particular – is symptomatic of a specific schizophrenia endemic to the privatized communal isolationism of our bourgeois-centric spectacular society. He notes,

> (d)eath close to home is concealed, while death as a universal human predicament, the death of anonymous and 'generalized' others, is put blatantly on display, made into a never ending street spectacle that, no more a sacred or carnival event, is one among many of daily life's paraphernalia. So banalized death is made too familiar to be noted and much too familiar to arouse high emotions. It is the 'usual' thing, much too common to be dramatic and certainly too common to be dramatic about. Its horror is exorcised through its omnipresence, made absent through the excess of visibility, made negligible through being ubiquitous, silenced through deafening noise. And as death fades away and eventually dies out through banalization, so does the emotional and volitional investment in craving for its defeat...[105]

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[104] This series of executions – aboard a spacecraft called "The Executor," no less – structures an equally overlookable yet particularly, subversively nasty subplot in this generally mytho-affirmative "mere fantasy film": with each officer slain, the effete and meekly toadying Piett (Kenneth Colley) rises through the military ranks, addressed at each instance of promotion-by-murder with his new title of position. In addition to the implicit commentary on 1980s cutthroat corporate culture and the post-Vietnam consciousness of the disposability of military personnel at the whims of power, these scenes echo a sentiment on fascistic coercive power also evident in a sequence from Spielberg's *Schindler's List.* As Itzhak Stern (Ben Kingsley) relates to Schindler (Liam Neeson) the calculatedly machinic nature of Amon Göethe's (Ralph Fiennes) "interrogation" methods, we see Goethe executing, one by one, every prisoner in a ghetto barrack to determine which has disobeyed a relatively minor regulation. The only prisoner left alive is the one who was in fact "guilty" – and Göethe knew this in advance of his actions, carrying them out as a display of his power for the transgressor, for the weak of will or mind that can remain an unproblematic and subservient subject (the meek inherit life, the strong death).

[105] Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 159-160. Ellipses his.

Two brief but crucial conclusory observations may be drawn from this statement. First, and most obviously, is the way in which the concealment of death "close to home" (that most endemically bourgeois sphere) is intimately of a piece with the characteristic distance and inoculation from violence and its effects in bourgeois consciousness: the visualization of death is not its concern, the extent of its reality too much to express or imagine, its experience privatized and commoditized. But at the same time, this double-movement – the banalization of death and its violences through its omnipresence, coupled with the necessity for its inevitability to be recognized as the limit against which all success, production, and consumption are ultimately validated – constitutes something of a new wrinkle in the constitution of the contemporary bourgeoisie: neither necessarily exempt from the consciousness of death nor spurred on by its spectre, the resultant relation to death is part and parcel with a particular holding pattern of historical development, a stasis wherein the forces and exigencies of change – the "race against the clock" – are replaced by an entropic being-in-the-moment. If we remain morally disgusted by death, we are no longer truly horrified by it: death, and the stasis it represents, is installed as an accepted condition, faced without the means or desire to push, resist, or rail against it; a reversal of the dream of immortality, to be sure, but moreover *a final resignation to the world and all its violence.*

It is clear enough that when violence is divested of its effects as a product of these processes and techniques of representation and separation, it becomes impotent as a revolutionary or progressive corrective but omnipotent in its banality and mythic commonality. And this voiding of consequential thought certainly finds an ideal medium and site of reception for its operation: as part and parcel with the myriad sovereign rationales and causal configurations the cinema (re)introduces into the thought of violence, its voyeuristic and vicarious encounter is one, always and necessarily encouraged, of an *insular, consequenceless, depoliticized, and ultimately consumptive relation to events and others* that perpetually informs the bourgeois subject "proper" and maintains that subject's degree-zero positioning within the late-capitalist geopolitical chaosmos. That the mendaciously constrained questions and paranoiacally reactionary discourses propagated by contemporary proponents of 'desensitization theories' never engage this (or indeed any other) political fact is, of course, telling: this is the nexus of bourgeois existence, the simultaneous distance from violence concomitant with a constitutionally conceptual and operational subjection to and replication of it. It is therefore unsurprising that those that most violently recoil against and reactively oppose represented violence are, ironically and unconsciously, those who rely most upon the structure that both enables and necessitates it – and its subject – in the first place. In fact, the move to (re)link violence in representation with any number of real effects, not least violent acts that occur in actuality, bespeaks the desperate attempt to not only contain the contingencies of violence, but also restore the causal chain, to rationalize the "irrational" (or supra-rational) of the violent via a representational sublimation into the abstract paradigm of "civil society," to reclaim the sense of agency and purpose itself from its discursive spaces of containment. Coordinate with the generalized crisis of the bourgeoisie, a counterintuitive conclusion can be reached: it is only when the threat of violence is taken *most* seriously that it becomes a locus for entertainment, when its discourse – its mythology – is completely implanted in the subtle mechanics of the everyday, buried so deeply that it becomes fully transparent and microcosmically replicated in every representation, act of consumption, and affirmation of belief.

And in this, the final (and perhaps most productive) twist. The disappearance of death from the scene finally and decisively expiates and expunges the conscience that makes subjects of us all: it is thus not simply a matter of unproblematic consumption, but more importantly of the dream of non-relational being, a being not predicated on an act fully without consequence, but without a consequence that can come back to haunt. The disposable and disposed dead express a utopian situation: that the other may be absolutely vanquished, its threats deposed, and the indebted relation disappears – case closed for lack of evidence, nothing to be continued, nothing to haunt, nothing to fear, nothing, ultimately, to *feel*. So while we can understand in the handling of the image of death something of a potential crisis of representation, a potential limit to its productivity that is resolved in and alongside the wholesale flattening of historical consciousness, there is also another, related, and equally potent flattening at stake here that will concern us in the next chapter: the flattening of affect that is comorbid with spectacular separation, and that, perhaps paradoxically enough, may also find its quickening within the same reified images of violence this cinema offers.

CHAPTER FOUR
LUDOVICO IN ACTION:
FROM IMAGES OF VIOLENCE TO THE VIOLENCE OF IMAGES

> *At the technological level, when images chosen and constructed by someone else have everywhere become the individual's principal connection to the world he formerly observed for himself, it has certainly not been forgotten that these images can tolerate anything and everything; because within the same image all things can be juxtaposed without contradiction. The flow of images carries everything before it, and it is similarly someone else who controls at will this simplified summary of the sensible world; who decides where the flow will lead as well as the rhythm of what should be shown, like some perpetual, arbitrary surprise, leaving no time for reflection, and entirely independent of what the spectator might understand or think of it.*[1]
>
> Guy Debord
> *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle*

> *And viddy films I would. Where I was taken to, brothers, was like no cine I'd viddied before. I was bound up in a straightjacket, and my gulliver was strapped to a headrest with like wires running away from it. Then they clamped like lid-locks on me eyes, so that I could not shut them, no matter how hard I tried. It seemed a bit crazy to me, but I let them get on with what they wanted to get on with. If I was to be a free malchick again in a fortnight's time, I would put up with much in the meantime, O my brothers.*
>
> "Alex de Large" (Malcolm McDowell)
> *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick)

> *You're not cured yet. There's still a lot to be done. Only when your body reacts promptly and violently to violence, as to a snake, without further help from us, without medication, only then…*[2]
>
> "Dr. Brodsky"
> *A Clockwork Orange* (Burgess)

PREFACE:
FIELDS & FRAMES

In a sense, we have already explored how Hollywood cinema enacts what is perhaps its worst violence: a violence against violence itself, the violence of representation decisively impacting and determinately, forcefully shaping and extending its thought in geopolitical space and material relations. But at the same time, this focus has delimited our scope of inquiry not only to images *of* violence, but to images that enact *a certain, programmatic violence* beholden to the exigencies of likewise certain and programmatic political and ideological constellations. These considerations have precluded others that are equally important in situating the parameters and potentialities of "violence in cinema": the ways in which this cinema's images of violence both belie and subtend *the violence of images*, the ways in which this cinema's integral violences play out upon the somewhat more inchoate field of the *feeling* subject, the ways in which these political and ideological forces merge with, shift into, and even give way in the face of the *affective.*

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[1] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 28.
[2] Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, 116. Ellipses mine.

The inhering and even necessary relation between the cinematic medium and the affective is, by now, well-trod ground. From Benjamin and Kracauer's ontological propositions to Silverman's psychoanalytic and materialist readings of cinematic suture to Deleuze's theses on the intensive and evocative power of the face, the involuntary and reflexive physiological or emotional spectatorial response is certainly paramount in the cinematic encounter, constituting both its allure and its greatest potentiality in reconnecting, if even briefly, that disjunct between perception and experience in the "reclamation of physical reality." But the current status of the affective, to say nothing of its potential violence, is less distinct, and certainly more contentious. To be sure, we might recognize such materially powerful reconnections and responses as remarkable events in spectacular society, wherein, as Jameson laments, there is a critical dearth of affect: at best, we are left with Kracauerian moments of sensory intensity in relative and fleeting excess of a generalized relentless hyperstimulation, at worst an aleatory miasma of empty sensationalism operating at the egregious and irrevocable expense of the depth of bodily-material feeling and expression, even on the absention of the bodily-material altogether.

In *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson suggests that the waning of affect in contemporary Western capitalist culture may be best approached and understood via two related transformations: on the one hand, the end of the monadic bourgeois ego and its romanticist valorization of interiority, and on the other, the wholesale reification of the human figure as object, in which all its gestures, communicabilities, and presence have given way to mere simulacra. The waning of affect is *simultaneously an aesthetic and political problematic*, a crisis for and of the potentiality of each: for Jameson, an image as expressive and evocative of the "modern" conditions of alienation, anxiety, and sublime terror as Munch's *The Scream* is something of an impossibility today, the potential for the communicative expression or felt registration of whatever affect having been deflated and swept away. As he argues,

> (t)he very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that "emotion" is then projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inner feeling.[3]

In postmodernism's aesthetic and discursive "depthlessness," Jameson finds an affective dispersal and discombobulation, wherein "the alienation of the subject" – and its means of expression and recognition as such, the very basis for a representational politics in an age of wholesale representation – "is displaced by the latter's fragmentation."[4] With the death of the modernist, monadic subject (a subject that Jameson is loathe to valorize either, as it is for him coterminous with the bourgeois ego and its potentially productive yet overly-celebrated psychopathologies[5]) and its diffusion into the realm of spectacle and pastiche, comes a death of expression and feeling; he claims,

> (a)s for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings – which it may be better and more accurate, following J.-F. Lyotard, to call "intensities" – are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria...[6]

And it is with this predominately euphoric ephemerality of affect and sensorial intensity that Jameson isolates the source and effect of this deadening: an emptying or flattening of the experience of the Burkian-Kantian sublime – a violent, terrifying, and deeply psychophysiological experience in the face of an overpowering encounter with that which exceeds conceptualization – into a structure of surface-level affects. In this decisive "moment of a radical eclipse of Nature itself," forces of technologization have conquered and displaced the natural as that terrifying site of incommensurability with which we may be confronted, a displacement whereby the depth of bodily feeling has been channeled into and replaced by so many empty images that have, by now, come to fully substitute for any authentic experience, reflection, or feeling. As he laments in "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity," within spectacular society's seeming "return of the aesthetic" in degraded, "modish" appeals to the sublime in political-aesthetic theory and artistic production alike, we find ourselves caught up in a structure of sensation and experience (of art, to be sure, but of anything in particular), celebrated for its own sake, comprised primarily and merely of

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[3] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 11-12.

[4] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 14.

[5] As he notes, "The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego – what I have been calling the waning of affect." (*Postmodernism*, 15) For Jameson here, the romantic-baroque valorization of interiority as both the fundament for the authentic, centered subject is something of an aporia for his own project: on the one hand, expression (in whatever sense) is inextricably tied to this "conception of the subject as a monadlike container, within which things felt are expressed by projection outward" (15), and as such constitutes something of a modernist myth that can only be pushed against by affirming it to some degree; on the other hand, if the individual monad is the precondition for expression, there is a "heavy price to be paid for that precondition," namely "the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm, you thereby shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the mindless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison cell without egress." (15) In other words, in order to critique (and condemn) the more deleterious effects of late capitalism – including the terrible waning of affect which concerns Jameson so – he must also hold up, as something of a preferable alternative, a kind of subjectivity and aesthetic of expression that is, at least by his own terms, completely informed by capitalist production and philosophy as well, and in its "resurrection" in culture and theory – Jameson's as well – even nostalgicized.

[6] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 15-16.

> aleatory perceptions, in which glints of colour are collected from this or that surface in passing, fragments of form consumed in Benjaminian distraction, and as though laterally, out of the corner of the eye, textures acknowledged, densities navigated in an unmappable way with space assembling and disassembling itself oneirically around you. Under these conditions aesthetic attention finds itself transferred to the life of perception as such, abandoning the former object that organized it and returning into subjectivity, where it seems to offer a random and yet wide-ranging sampling of sensations, affectabilities and irritations of sense data and stimulations of all sorts and kinds. This is not a recovery of the body in any active and independent way, but rather its transformation into a passive and mobile field of 'enregistrement' in which tangible portions of the world are taken up and dropped again in the permanent inconsistency of a mesmerizing sensorium.[7]

For Jameson, in the absence of any concretizable and intensely engaged connection to the natural and consequently to the intensivity of the experience of sublime affects, those like responses in its presence fade away and refract into a kind of mute, giddy stupor: affect, with all its power and potentiality, becomes its own empty, codified, and instrumentalized image, the emergence and violence of any authentic response (to say nothing of the means which might call it forth) a virtual impossibility in the blank parodies of expression and subjective experience that late capitalism affords.

But to pick up where Jameson's hastily-dismissed notation of Lyotard's concept of affective intensities leaves off, we may also consider the violence of the affective by way Deleuze's related formulations: that is, by way of its centrality in relations of force and power, not only in terms of the latter's deterministic effects upon the subject (that is, in the degrees to which the subject occupies the state or position of "being-affected," either locally or vis-à-vis the general conditions of its mode of existence), but also in what may be unleashed from or actualized within that subject, wittingly or not, in the process. As we have already seen, Deleuze's notion of affection is by turns maddeningly opaque and terrifically fluid, and this carries over in his theorization of affect as such: a quality of conceptualization owing in large part to what he sees as the irreducibly ineffable constitution of affect itself, as a field of colliding relational forces distinct and relatively autonomous from categories of the individual subject and ideology as such. If there is a kind of concise schematization of his idea of affect, it is as the experience and expression of an increase or decrease in the body's power to act, a point of resonation, consonant or dissonant, between two forces (e.g., between the spectator and the image): an *intensity*, the *expressed quality of an experience as such.*

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[7] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, 112.

This quality, moreover, is at once thoroughly psychophysical but not necessarily bound to a phenomenological subject per se, in a formulation owing most strongly to the Bergsonian relation between perception and affection. As Deleuze says of his painting and cinema projects in "On Philosophy,"

> I think concepts [and the production thereof, particularly in image media] involve two other dimensions, percepts and affects. (...) Percepts aren't perceptions, they're packets of sensations and relations that live on independently of whoever experiences them. Affects aren't feelings, they're becomings that spill over beyond who lives them.[8]

In relation to these structures of seeing (percepts) and feeling (affects) as they are actualized in the specific encounter between spectator and image, "what we commonly call perception is actually a mixture of external perception and internal affection, and this mixture is necessitated by our corporeal existence."[9] In Ronald Bogue's words (calling on salient passages from Bergson's *Matter and Memory*),

> (o)ur perceptions allow us to assess at a distance the potential actions of things on us and our possible action on them. (...) Since our calculation of impending external movements and possible responses depends on an awareness of our bodily situation in the world, our perception is necessarily tied to our corporeal sensations/affections. But perception and affection remain qualitatively distinct. Perception takes place in the object, affection in the body. Since we are embodied perceivers, however, "there is no perception without affection. Affection is thus that which,

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[8] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 137. Brackets mine.

[9] Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema*, 36.

> from the interior of our body, we mix with the image of exterior bodies" (1959, 206; 1911, 60). Perception "measures the reflective power of the body, affection its absorbant power" (1959, 205; 1911, 57). We can see, then, that the eye has a dual function, in that it is an organ of perception that reflects and filters external movements at a distance as well as a tactile surface of the body that undergoes the affections of direct contact with external movements.[10]

Moreover, as Brian Massumi explains in "The Autonomy of Affect," the Deleuzian concept of affect is one which is *not*, as it is in senses derived from psychoanalytic discourse, confounded with the emotional, and certainly not with the presubjective: rather, it is immanent to the social as a matter of relations, reactions, and responses, yet distinct from the emotional insofar as emotional reactions and responses (sadness, fear, joy, and so forth) are *recoded* affects, *qualified* expressions complicit in their own instrumentalization and reification. In his words,

> (a)n emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is a qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. (...) *If some have the impression that affect has waned, it is because affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognizable, and is thus resistant to critique.*[11]

As such, affects are less "unrecognizable" at the level of what Deleuze calls *sensation* (the "structure" and "logic" of which we will discuss later) than unpredictable, uncodified, and, consequently, uncodifiable: affects are intensities and, as Massumi succinctly notes, "(i)ntensity is the unassimilable."[12] In short, affect *arises*, it *happens*, and, for Deleuze, it both constitutes and is constituted in a "center of indetermination" (the "living image" of the subject), precipitating qualitative transformations in ineffable moments of becoming. Arising from the localized but unschematizable specificity of an encounter between forces – in terms of the subject, its experience of the encounter as such, in the immediate coincidence of subject and object as event – affect subverts attempts to render its structure legible and accessible in discourse and in criticism: not only like violence but as violence, it evades discourse, it evades *any* means of translation, nominalization, or recoding.

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[10] Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema*, 37.
[11] Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 221. Emphases mine.
[12] Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 221.

The general incommensurability between the Jamesonian and Deleuzian affective resides, of course, in the primacy of the subject to the equation, as a field either upon or against which the problem of affect is situated. For Jameson, the loss or death of the individual/personal (qua intensive monadic interiority) is equated with a loss of emotion (as a quality proprietary to the individual as such), and subsequently in large part with the flattening or disappearance of affect: the individual subject qua "person" is the only zone in which affects may arise and be registered. But in its absence or dissolution – and this is where the incommensurability may become productive for us – nothing but a clear picture of Deleuzian affect remains: once the emotional-personal nexus with all its ideologized baggage is removed from the equation, affect and its relation to force and power may be recognized in scope and quality. Indeed, as Massumi argues, late capitalism is not at all marked by a dearth of affect, but a surfeit. "Affect *is* the whole world: from the precise angle of its differential emergence,"[13] he argues, as the forces of virtualization, actualization, and potentialization continually traverse and collide – a notion that, should one even briefly consider the relentless interaffectivity of forces internal to and connecting the market, material conditions of individual and social experience, production, and consumption, the categories, parameters, and calcifications of thought, and so forth, seems all the more sensible: an atomic and monadological model of the relation of forces in the Bergsonian "open whole," such as that presented by Deleuze, is one in which all elements are inherently, immanently interaffective, always giving or having the dynamic potential to give rise to new ways of thinking, seeing, and feeling. Atoms all, *we and images alike*, interchangeable and intersecting:

> *Every image acts on others and reacts to others, on 'all their facets at once' and 'by all their elements'.* (...) An atom is an image which extends to the point to which its actions and reactions extend. My body is an image, hence a set of actions and reactions. My eye, my brain, are images, parts of my body. How could my brain contain images since it is one image among others? External images act on me, transmit movement to me, and I return movement: how could images be in my consciousness since I am myself image, that is, movement? And can I even, at this level, speak of 'ego', of eye, of brain and of body? Only for simple convenience; for nothing can yet be identified in this way. It is rather a gaseous state. Me, my body, are rather a set of molecules and atoms which are constantly renewed. Can I even speak of atoms? They are not distinct from worlds, from interatomic influences. It is a state of matter too hot for one to be able to distinguish solid bodies in it. It is a world of

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[13] Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 235.

> universal variation, of universal undulation, universal rippling: there are neither axes, nor centre, nor left, nor right, nor high, nor low. … [14]

The methodological differences here certainly present something of an impasse that the present inquiry cannot fully map, let alone resolve (and they may well be irresolvable anyway). Nonetheless, by either the Jamesonian or Deleuzian consideration – and both will be important here, if in different ways – the affective indeed presents us with a certain violence vis-à-vis late capitalism's multiple spectacularization and spectralizations: most generally in its qualities of intensive and transformative indistinction in the event of the unforeseeable encounter with other forces or alterities, and particularly as it represents a tacit and tangible connexion, however brief in duration, however varying in intensity, between the observing eyes and the feeling body, between the virtualized experience of perception and the materiality of bodily sensation, shattering and imploding, intensively concentrating, to a singularizing point of indistinction, the very Cartesian distinctions and separations that the Debordian spectacle simultaneously extends and liquidates, *affect is violence. The response itself*, as the felt and registered experience either of being-affected or of an expressive release of constrained or forgotten energies, is what is critical in either case: it constitutes something of an experiential singularity, an authentic event among so many pseudoevents, an inexorable, unpredictable, and moreover *individual and indeterminable* response.

A nuanced and necessarily heuristic consideration of the affective dimensions of power, image, and violence – and moreover the unpredictable potentialities this dimension may unleash – is likewise key to understanding the subtle and not-so-subtle machinations of spectacular power in general, beyond and, as Massumi argues, even *after* ideology in late capitalism. For Massumi's proposal, ultimately, is that we begin to recognize not simply the alienating and deadening ideological forces at work in image culture, but alongside these to explore and develop an "affective theory of late-capitalist power."[15] As he argues, because ideology "itself" – and particularly when conceived as a uniform determinant of consciousness and desire – may no longer be a category commensurate with or explanatory of the diffuse and diffused networks of force and power operative in spectacular society, we must also look toward those potentialities which arise and are expressed in the fissures coordinate with capitalism's always-contradictory and tendentially self-destructive permissibilities. This is a thesis most concisely advanced in Deleuze and Guattari's "On Capitalism and Desire," where they work to move beyond the category of the ideological as they discuss the peculiar pathology of capitalism, its inherent madness that informs its outward rationality. For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism organizes desire and rationality (terms used coterminously with *interest*, interestingly) in fundamentally unreasonable ways. On the one hand, it is systemically transparent in its operations: "In capitalism … nothing is secret, at least in principle and according to the code;" on the other, "nothing is *admissible*."[16] In this "very special delirium," the focus of its self-maintenance is inexorably placed within the realm of the ideological. However, they argue that in the end

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[14] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 58. Emphases his.

[15] Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 235.

> (i)deology has no importance here: what matters is not ideology, and not even the "economic/ideological" distinction or opposition; what matters is the *organization of power*. Because the organization of power, i.e. the way in which desire is already in the economic, the way libido invests the economic, haunts the economic and fosters the political forms of repression.[17]

For Deleuze and Guattari, this means that even the productivities of the economic/ideological distinction found in Lukács and echoed in Jameson are untenable, inasmuch as such a distinction relegates the movement of desire to superstructural formations and phenomena – particularly ideological apparatuses and effects – and thereby denies to consideration the immanent systemic nature of desire in, under, and *as* capitalism. Simply, and in a formulation that puts them in surprisingly close proximity with Debord, they conclude that "(t)here is no ideology, only organizations of power, once you accept that the organization of power is the unity of desire and the economic infrastructure."[18]

In our epigraphal passage from Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, we can see already a fundamental, potentially productive tension in the inherent monology of the spectacle and its necessary non-correspondence with its subject. Between these sites, and more precisely at the point of their intersection, an irreducible gap emerges, a dynamic zone of *in*determination. While the spectacle may (and certainly does) tendentially reincorporate its unintended or ancillary effects back into its operational schemata, at the same time its ownmost *im*-mediacy, its inherent impermissibility of reflection (indeed, the very unthought of reflection *to* the system, operating in concerted ignorance of the spectator's understanding or comprehension), its very totalizing tendencies all the more open upon fields of indeterminacy that are the habitus of affect and becoming: as Agamben says (in a thesis we elaborated in Chapter One and will return to here), "the spectacle's violence is so destructive; but, for the same reason, the spectacle still contains something like a positive possibility – and it is our task to use this possibility against it."[19] In these terms, Gödel's incompleteness theorem is most apt, and worth revisiting: any functional system, the theorem states, can be either total or consistent – but never both. In the spectacle's movement toward an ever-more total systematicity and consistency of effects, the totality of spectacular relations always opens up the free radicalization and inconsistency the same, allowing for the *free radicalization and indeterminability of affects.*

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[16] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 263.
[17] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 263.
[18] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 264.

It is in this way that we can better understand Massumi's notion that what is at stake in late capitalism is not the waning of affect but its explosion into the totality of spectacular society. Within the latter's regimented and regimenting economy, this explosion and suffusion is less an economic, equal and opposite reaction (that is, the proportional, balancing, and hence predictable release of constrained forces and tensions) than a consequence of an immanent process of free radicalization of forces that indeed cuts both ways, with unpredictable results: the systolic forces of constraint/intension and the diastolic forces of expansion/extension pulsating and oscillating, like a stormy sea, like cluster bombs flashing in the night, with the spectacular economy's tendential forces working actively, axiomatically, and desperately to reterritorialize and recode these aberrancies, to shunt the lines of flight made possible by the economy itself. Deleuze describes this characteristic ebb and flow best in "On Capitalism and Desire," where he notes that

> in every respect, capitalism has a very particular character: its lines of flight are not just difficulties that arise, they are the very conditions of its operation. Capitalism is founded on a generalized decoding of every flow: flows of wealth, flows of labor, flows of language, flows of art, etc. It did not create any code, it created a kind of accounting, an axiomatics of decoded flows, as the basis of its economy. It ligatures the points of escape and moves ahead. It is always expanding its own borders, and always finds itself in a situation where it must close off new escape routes at its borders, pushing them back once more. It has resolved none of its fundamental problems. (…) It is endlessly crossing its own limits which keep reappearing farther

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[19] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 83.

> out. It puts itself in alarming situations with respect to its own production, its social life, its demographics, its periphery in the Third World, its interior regions, etc. The system is leaking all over the place. They spring from the constantly displaced limits of the system.[20]

In the cinema that concerns us here, this affective dimension can be understood as arising, operating, and manifest primarily within those dissonant or even patently unpleasurable sensations evinced by any number of images of violence, insofar as the aporetic character of the latter brings forth the former in relation to or in tension with normative and tacit codes of desire and knowledge, codes that these images force the subject to *confront*, if not consciously *recognize* (indeed, especially insofar as the recognition of what conditions these images entail, what is crucial here are those codifications which *are not or cannot be recognized*), and this *despite* the relative transparency of what these images hold within their frames, their ideological tendentiality and, ultimately, their precarious dependency *upon* the ideological in the service of "image-based power."[21] It is in this intrinsic and aporetic confrontation, itself an affectation, that images of violence may begin to be violent in themselves: indeed, *any* image may be violent insofar as it forces us into, confronts us with, or opens upon a *zone of indeterminacy*, an incommensurable gap between intentions and affectations, between knowledge and the unthought, and in so doing marks a *decisive moment* of potential disruption or transformation. In the gap induced by such a confrontation or recognition, beyond the intended unilinearity, univocality, and universality of ideological or narratological effects, a door is opened, and the affective is both the key and the content: the involuntary (or involuntarized) response that an image may subsequently call forth, and moreover the ability or capacity to be affected in such a way, the conditions for such a response happening at all.

But given this cinema's (and this mode of production's) demonstrable prowess in reining forces of indeterminacy to affirmative ends, *can* a cinematic image, indeed *any* image, give rise to affects which elude or evade a "productive" recoding, that escape or resist their axiomatic reintegration into the totality of spectacularized relations and the latter's field of "proper affects," that, ultimately, may enact a violence against such parametrics, exploiting their breaches, exploding their limits of inclusion? And what might distinguish a "violent image" – that is, an image that calls forth or actualizes affects of power or force – from any given image *of* violence? Indeed, can any such distinction be made at all?

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[20] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 270.
[21] Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 235.

As noted above, vis-à-vis the totalizing political, ethical, and ultimately ideological codings that buttress the violent imaginary, all cinematic images of violence may also *potentially* be violent images, inasmuch as they may evoke a certain *frisson*, an involuntary and determinate psychophysical shudder in the face of that which is either normally excluded from thought and experience or, as is more commonly the case in cinematic presentations of violence, that which is normatively and nominally in the category of the abject but framed within the context of the pleasurable. On the part of the viewing subject, this frisson may arise to the extent that such images can constitute a singular and intensive nexus of an epistemological and affective *dissonance*, however easily and readily sublimated this dissonance may be – by the rationalizing and justificatory force of violent imaginary and its systemic, systematized subject-object relations – into the *jouissance* of consumption and a coordinately affirmative sense of violence's objective externality to lived experience. Even at the level of the apparatus – and, more to the point, at the level of its material end, the film, operating as a nexus of dialectical consumption – there is a potential dissonance in presenting violence: its most favored object is both custom-fit for its mechanics but antithetical to its tendential aspirations, intra- and extra-medial, for the establishment of a plane of formal and affective consistency.

Certainly, in its operative dialectic of axiomatic inclusion and procedural exception, there is precious little that this cinema cannot accommodate and render useful in terms of content: even the most repulsive or distasteful acts, calling forth the most extreme affects, can be recoded and reterritorialized, made to fit the contours of its programmatic ends, shaped and refined to a science of acceptable and productive (to say nothing of profitable) presentations. While, for example, the (self-) rape of Regan (Linda Blair) in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) presents a truly horrifying image which abuts and distends all moral, to say nothing of legal, points of reference – compounding crime (child rape and abuse) with blasphemy (crucifix-as-dildo) with taboo (preadolescent feminine sexuality and masturbation) with vulgarity ("fuck me!") – none of these components, in themselves or even additively, cannot be assimilated and accommodated to already-coded knowledge or affects: indeed, they are all so heavily overcoded before the fact that the sequence is, in its chosen perversions, perversely conventional and conservative. In this, certainly, there is one kind of violence at play: an instrumental, disciplinary-subjectivating violence that erects and operates within strict parameters of presentation, presentability, and knowledge, parameters which, in the pressure applied to them, all the more subtly but forcibly constrain the very limits of thought, perception, and imagination that were there to begin with, in ways that are operative on the side of both production and reception. But the affects that emerge are always-already coded, always-already affirming that from which they came, and hence their violence is qualified both before and after the fact.

This is why we might also automatically exclude such common devices of shock or startlement as "shock-" or "flash-frames," from our lexicon of "violent images": while violent in a general cinematic regard, they are fundamentally little more than amplifications of preexisting and codified formal principles and potentialities; in, of, and as themselves, they offer nothing of the quality of violence that would constitute a kind of substantive difference or dissonance, but rather more of the same, within a textual system designed to aggregationally accommodate and accumulate more of the same. In essence, their *calculated, tactical insertion* into the scene is uniformly to evoke a uniform response, felt the same by all, at once: the affects to which they give rise are not only codifiable and accounted for, before the fact, by the audience – they are also so by the cinema itself. The same might also be said of any number of "shocking moments" in this cinema of shock: the reprehensible or disgusting (as in the case of *The Exorcist*), the appearance or revelation of a monster (as in *Jaws* or *Alien*, which hold that revelation to a calculated moment of greatest affective tension), the sudden, "unforeseen" attack (as in any number of serial murder or slasher films), expressly political or ideological images (such as the intercutting of the Rodney King beating with the burning of the American flag in *Malcolm X* (1992), or the collapsed Statue of Liberty closing *Planet of the Apes* (1968)) or even that most curious of contemporary clichés, the "shock ending" which upends the preceding narrative entire (from *Planet of the Apes* and *Chinatown* (1974) to *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Se7en* (1995), and *The Sixth Sense* (1999)).

All of these are violent in certain ways, evoking a certain dissonance or disorientation, to be sure, but none exceeding a certain parameter of acceptability and expectability vis-à-vis generic, moral, epistemological, or even affective categories: in this, they conform as much to Massumi's admonitions as to Jameson's, as reified and instrumentalized images reliant on reified and instrumentalized signifiers and their already-fixed affective charges. But at the same time, and particularly in our current context, those most basic profit principles which, to provide at least a semblance of (the experience of) "the new," absolutely require the expansion and even explosion of previously sacrosanct representational conventions,[22] by their own internal demands perpetually open a sphere in which the field of representation itself may confront the viewer not simply with *spectacular* sights *unseen*, but *sensational* sights *unimaginable*: images which confront and rupture the limits not only of representation "as we know it," but of the spectacularized consciousness, imagination, and affective horizons which share those limits, exploding the ideal correspondence between spectacular-discursive means and their subjectivizing and programmatic ends.

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Clearly, the task here – to attempt to trace out the points of contact and distinction between the "image of violence" and the "violent image" by way of theories of the affective – presents a number of challenges; as with the discussion of the quality and character of violence that opened this inquiry, a heuristic approach may well be the only possible approach. In the attempt to understand what a "violent image" might be (and, more to the point, what it might be capable of), we might make a propositional bracketing and say that the "violence of images" we are concerned with here is *not* exactly what we have called the "violence of representation": the latter is a procedural violence (of making whatever content the content of discourse), while the former extends (as an extensory stratum) beyond this point of procedural production, if always also from it, into potentially unforeseeable and certainly unpoliceable territory (affect). Coordinately, we must bear in mind that what we might call the "violence of images" ultimately encompasses *both* of Deleuze's affective considerations – the capacity to affect and the capacity to be affected – in ways neither necessarily complementary nor necessarily exclusive: on the one hand, the instrumental deployment of images, intrinsically violent or otherwise, to implicitly but expressly violent ends (i.e., in support of an ideological or subjectivizing process: the image mobilized and motivated as instrument of violence in the negotiation of power relations, desire, and knowledge); on the other hand, the affective violences that images may enact and inflict, either as a means to or in excess of those ends, from the aforementioned frisson (and, to an extent, even shock) in the field of the spectator-subject to more generalized disruptions and destabilizations, intended or otherwise, into or against the grain of the operative economy of the violent imaginary manifest in this cinema's presentational codes and conventions.

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[22] Indeed, an argument could be made that in the contemporary paucity of innovation in the content of stories, all cinematic innovation now must occur at the *purely formal-presentational level*, pushing these parameters into new and radical territory while retaining (and even reverting to) more archetypal-affirmative narrative content.

And finally, coordinate with Massumi's proposals, we might attempt to examine the potential violence of images apart from overarching, organizing idealities, investigating them *in themselves*, even apart from the very narratological structures which include (if not always "contain") them, for what they may immanently actualize in excess of, and even *contrary to* these idealities and imaginaries, and perhaps especially when they are ostensibly and sensibly conscripted to the service of these latter. And if exploring the potential violence of images will require a movement even to disengage from the focus on images *of* violence (if not in all the senses this might be taken, then certainly the empirical), we can also understand that this nominal separation of the "violence of the image" from any specific representation *of* violence is most evident in shots and sequences where nothing resembling violence per se is in evidence. In his monograph on Francis Bacon, Deleuze argues that the violence in and of a depiction is distinct from the violence in and of sensation: the former corresponding to the sensational, to representational clichés, and to the fundamentally reassuring quality of the aesthetic-realist correspondence between the object and its representation, the latter relatively disengaged from that correspondence and those codificatory conditions (e.g., from those ideological and subjective buttresses which accommodate a perception's affections to normative registers) and as such endowed with a measure of affective immediacy the former simply cannot allow (or, for that matter, abide). We will explore this distinction and its implications more fully later; for the moment, we might simply note that for Deleuze, the "very special violence" of Bacon's images has less to do with any specific content, however instructive or important it may be, but rather lies in the degree to which they open or open upon fields of indeterminacy conducive to the emergence or production of new concepts, percepts, and affects: a function, in the Deleuzian topology, singularly matched to cinema.

To help in disentangling the notion of the image of violence from the violent image (or, at least, to demonstrate the fine weaving that tenuously interlaces these concepts) in contemporary Hollywood cinema, I would now like to consider some paradigmatic indices that this cinema, itself, gives us: a selection of singular moments that reveal and express the medium's capacity not only to unlock and unleash "violent images," but also to engage with their potentialities; moments that will allow us to more fully explore the ways in which the indeterminacies of the text-spectator dialectic opens up on these questions of the affective; moments that, ultimately, might provide a structure in which we can better understand both the limits of cinematic representation and the violence of their trespass.

PARADIGM I.A: THE SHOWER SCENE

> *The term 'imagery' is particularly appropriate, because what we're saying is that it isn't necessary to photograph something violent in order to convey the feeling of violence, but rather to film that which gives the impression of violence.*[23]
>
> François Truffaut
> *Hitchcock/Truffaut*

> *Imagination, of course, can open any door– turn the key and let terror walk right in.*[24]
>
> Truman Capote
> *In Cold Blood*

Both because and in spite of its current canonization as a template for contemporary images of violence, the "Shower Scene" in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) still best demonstrates that – and even better demonstrates *how* – there is as much a distinction between images "of" violence and the violence of the cinematic image "itself" as there is a critical, even necessary interdependence and indistinction between the two. This sequence certainly demonstrates that the primary order of cinematic imagistic force lies not in the representation "proper" of whatever act of violence – of the cut that rends flesh, for example, or even of that violation's irreparable material aftereffect – but in another set of cuts altogether: in the framing and ordering of the profilmic raw material, in the absentions and juxtapositions inherent to découpage and montage which reveal as much as they conceal to the eye.

So critical to the cumulative violence of the sequence, the Shower Scene's editorial form presents an instrumental perfection of and subjectivized acculturation to the principles of cinema's integral violence, and quite apart from any consideration of the medium's aptitude or affinity with violent material per se: here in particular, the violence of presentation absolutely supercedes the violence in representation. The cuts here are qualitatively different from those discretionary cut-aways that marked Code-era Hollywood construction, a movement not away from, but in/to: into the incisions, into the space of violence, *into the very moment of violence itself*; the intimacy of the distance is highlighted and inverted here, rather than a distancing forced into the intimacy of the act. The schizophrenic complexes of immediacy and mediality, of distancing and drawing in, of specular fascination and alienation, of aversion and interpellation in the contiguity of discontinuity that together inform the cinema's unique modality of suture and commodity character alike, are all in full evidence here: these are the very same principles upon which both the spectacular relation to the violent imaginary is founded and through which they operate, both for and against the subject of cinema that is always-already the complicit subject of violence.

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[23] Truffaut, *Hitchcock/Truffaut*, 265.
[24] Capote, *In Cold Blood*, 88.

But in addition to these inhering violences, *Psycho*'s shower scene can also serve as a useful initial point of entry to examine where, precisely, the violence "of" these images – *the images themselves* – lies, how it is constituted, and where it takes its effects. In this sequence, it is helpful to remember, one never *sees* the knife penetrate flesh, one never *witnesses* the instrument exact its violence, nor blood spring from the wounds inflicted; as such, it is the obverse of the obsessive focus *on* the moment of violence that marks this cinema's presentational compulsions. To be sure, the scene's violently asystematic framings, cuttings, and perspectival repositionings supply the most shocking and disorienting blows, every jump-cut in accord with the screech of the score, each standing in for the violence that is not represented and introducing another: the parts here (at the level of individual images, sequentially but not necessarily "logically" or syntactically opening up on one another) do not add up to a coherent whole, but rather an asymmetrical and exhausting cumulation – violent in form, certainly violent in effect, but crucially *not* violent in the explicit empirical content of the images.[25] In this regard, the sequence is little more than a pantomime of violence, impressionistic shadow play at best – and this is quite precisely where the violence of the sequence lies: *despite and indeed because of what is not explicitly shown*, the spectator interpolates the violence, inserts in his or her own pathological imaginary the stabs and slices in the absence of the present(ed) referent, restaging the scene in a space quite apart from that of the screen, the primary field of presentation.

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[25] A brief note needs to be made on this account, and in line with Truffaut's and Hitchcock's conception of "the image" as something that arises from a synthesis of pictorial and extrapictorial elements, as regards the critical contributions of sound – normally considered the "extra-imaginary" – to the effect of violence in general. While this study is obviously concerned with the register of the image in the cinematic experience, the use of intra-and extra-diegetic sound cannot be discounted or ignored. Certainly, the sound-image can supplement what is and even substitute for what is not. It can also, in the case of the sequence in question, function to both amplify the violence of the image as well as distract from it. The almost self-aware prominence of the score serves here as much to distance the viewer, reassure him or her that what is being witnessed is a construction, as it does to support or bolster the images alone. Indeed, in this scenario the music's rhythmic organization of the cuts, the cohesion, continuity, and regularity it imposes on them from without, does more to mediate and mitigate the effect than to enhance or extend it. For another iteration of this idea, see Jameson's discussion of the role of the score in the Parallax Test below.

The primary point to be drawn from this is one that has already been posited and, on the face of it, is quite simple: despite its essential mooring in and affinities with the visual, violence need not be *seen* to be *registered*, it need not be *witnessed* to be *felt*, it need not be immediately and evidently *present* to take its *effects*. Related to this, a second (and equally simple) point from a well-recognized tenet of the suspense film: that the field of the imagination is far more fecund than that of the screen, that what is left unshown is far more terrifying in effect than both what *is* and, as relates those arbitrary lines of "presentability," what *may be*. But from the conditions implied by and implicit within these points, a more complex set of concerns arises regarding the totality of the cinematic encounter. Faced with this withholding of direct, depictive presentation, the spectator is confronted with an even more substantively violent scenario: the forcing of the imagination to turn to, resurrect, and reconstruct its own unthinkable categories, the forcing, moreover, of the imagination into action, into activity normally surrendered to the explicit presentations the film-text affords. And while this alone is certainly not enough to fully negate or supplant the phenomenological character of violence and its imaginary that we recognize so well, this somewhat simple observation also speaks to the other side of this token: our anticipation and expectation of the inevitability of violence, our tacit resignation to it as a structuring, quasi-absented presence in whatever encounter with the visual, and certainly within that of this cinema. Further, this also instructively speaks to the conditions *of* that resignation, contributing to and sustaining its unconscious character: the invisible machinations and violent incisions integral to spectacular society and cinema alike, at work in and through, and *beyond* and *between* every image presented.

What this sequence reveals, as a kind of hyperbolization of what this cinema is capable of, is that in the cinematic encounter there is *always* a certain, bifurcated violence to the imagination of the subject: at once to the ability *to* imagine (the ideational capacity to construct images in, and of, thought) and to the attendant parameters thereof; forced into action by the microscopic vacuums in presentation, the imagination is *compelled* to bring forth the most horrifying panoply of abattoirial sights. In this, there is a coincident (if not equal) violence in the substitution of this subjective imagination with another, within the regime of image-production: the supplantation of the subject's imagination with that permitted by the violent imaginary, its archive and economy of images *of* violence, from which the subject, separated from the "fact" of violence, must draw.[26] This, then, returns us to that fundamental consideration of the spectacle which binds its logic to that of the cinema: not merely or simply a means of image-production, nor the totality and totalizing function of its ends (images both of and finally as the world), but rather *the very relation between subject and image*, their mutual and symbiotic determinisms, the capacity to both differentiate between image and ideation and the surrender of free ideation to the regime of the image.

Certainly, the operative conditions of the spectacle exert and enact a general (but nevertheless very real) violence to the category of the imagination, the very ability to imagine, in its directive "simplified summary of the sensible world."[27] In this, Baudrillard's notion of simulation is particularly apt, and provides something of an analogical connection between the general relations of Debord's spectacle and their manifestations in the codified clichés of commercial cinema. In very much the same way that, to extend Baudrillard's thesis, all crimes can be understood as simulations of those already seen, so have action and acts of imagination become mere but meaningful simulations of already-presented ideas, a recycling of simulacral notions (further simulacralized in such exemplary cinematic icons as Bonnie and Clyde, and from them *Natural Born Killers'* Mickey and Mallory) that cuts to the very core of the capacities of Ihab Hassan's notion of immanent thought, which not unlike Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping, is situated as the contemporary "capacity of mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstractions and so become, increasingly, im-mediately, its own environment"[28] in the face of indeterminacy: presenting an image of itself to itself, representing itself and that which it apprehends in Benjaminian images of thought that, certainly to no small degree, are subsumed into the economy and indices permitted and promulgated within simulacral and spectacular society. And all of this is certainly no less (if not more) the case in the subject's emblematically spectacularized and monologic encounter with a cinema which, as so forcefully condemned by Adorno and Horkheimer,

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[26] Roland Barthes' *mea culpa* is instructive here: speaking of the indiscernibility of a photograph's reality, unable to decode the incidental detail of a young Nicaraguan man, standing before a slain, covered body with a rag held across his face, Barthes asks parenthetically, confessionally, "stench? secrecy? *I have no idea, knowing nothing of the realities of guerilla warfare.*" (*Camera Lucida*, 25; emphases mine)

[27] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 28.

[28] Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," 153.

> leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film… (…) They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. Those who are so absorbed by the world of the movie – by its images, gestures, and words – that they are unable to supply what really makes it a world, do not have to dwell on particular points of its mechanics during a screening. All the other films and products of the entertainment industry which they have seen have taught them what to expect; they react automatically.[29]

In the Shower Scene, however, something more is conjured and revealed precisely in that monologic "rush of facts": *between* the fact of the assault, the fact of the violent act, the fact of the disorientation and terror, and the fact of death, the fact is clear that nothing is seen apart from the fleeting evidence of means (the knife's cursory and elliptical movements in abbreviated thrusts and stabs) and ends (sounds of the absented impacts, met with struggle and screams, sparse but sufficiently registered drops of blood, the collapsing but unbloodied corpse ostensibly washed clean throughout the process of its mutilation and exsanguination) that would directly, explicitly *reveal* the kind and degree of violence taking place in the profilmic recorded material. The *labor of producing the evidence* of the immediate moments of impact, in the presentational vacuum opened by those editorial cuts that stand in for the cuts violating flesh, is precisely left to the literality of *imagination*, the circumstantial and circumscribing evidence sufficient to both draw the conclusion and complete the scene, *rationally*. It is at this point that the imagination undergoes a very real and potent violence in the face of these undeniable yet ineffable and nearly unanswerable demands: a simultaneous foreclosure of its will (unable to resist the general force of the interpellative demand) and faculties (unable to resist the specific interpolations demanded). It is thus also at this point that the objective comes fully into contact with, and threatens to give way to, the irreducibly subjective, the imaginary (as irreducible fact/icity), in reaching its own presentational limits, to those of imagination (as speculative potentiality). An oscillation, wild, unpredictable, and violent, erupts between the images demanded of thought, the rational conclusions drawn from those demands, and the capacity for those conclusions to exceed the parameters of that rationality that constituted the demand in the first place. In this oscillation, the limits of representation become the limits of imagination, and the limits of imagination become the limits of representation … but with both categories always tendentially operating in excess of their bounds.

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[29] Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 126-127.

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Deleuze, in his reading of the Kantian imagination in "The Idea of Genesis in Kant's Esthetics," speaks quite directly to the violence of this processing and the conundra it presents for the category of imagination. In Kant, Deleuze argues, there is a fundamental tension between reason and imagination (a tension which, in oblique but critical ways, echoes and mirrors his image of capitalism and its lines of flight), or in other terms, between that which *apprehends* the evident and that which, under the gun of *comprehension*, must construct a sufficient image of the evident in its absence. The imagination in Kant, Deleuze says, "schematizes without concepts": it is an infinitely mobile field in which connections, concatenations, and connotations are free to shift, fold, and merge, are free to be arranged and rearranged independently of preexisting conceptual categories; in this, it operates at a distance (and with a kind of relative autonomy) from the rational. But into this formulation, Deleuze introduces a critical distinction: "Schematizing is indeed an original act of the imagination," he says, "but always in respect to a determinate concept of the imagination. Without a concept from the understanding, the imagination does something else than schematize: it *reflects*. This is the true role of the imagination in esthetic judgment. It reflects the form of the object."[30]

But within the specific demands of Kantian judgment (demands that seek a kind of unity and consensus), this reflection is not to be understood as a sensible intuition: as this holds as its referent the "existing world," it belongs to the register of reason, bound to the objective and at least some degree of referential facticity.[31] Rather, Deleuze says, the

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[30] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 59.

[31] Deleuze explains this in the following way, with implications that we cannot fully consider here, but which reflect Truffaut's opening statement concerning the "impression of violence": "By *form*, here, we should not understand form of intuition (sensibility), because forms of intuition still refer to existing objects that in themselves constitute sensible matter; they belong to knowledge of objects. Esthetic form, however, merges with the reflection of the object in the imagination. (…) Only the design, the composition matter. These are the constitutive elements of esthetic forms, while colors and sounds are only adjuncts. In every respect, then, we must distinguish the intuitive form of sensibility from the reflected form of the imagination." (59) In the Shower Scene, we must distinguish the rational from the imagination in ways similar to distinguishing sense from sensation: on the one, rational and sensible level, there is "what a knife does" (cuts and slices: a general rational ascription of function), while on the other, imaginative and sensational level, there is "what a knife does *to a person*" (the terror of imagination drawing from the images and demands of sensibility and reason to construct an image unknown and unshown, but certainly felt).

Imagination must enter into a terrible compact with Reason – but it is in this compact, and the irreducible tension between these forces, that the Kantian aesthetic *experience* – understood as a matter of *intensity*, of *sensation*, of *affect* – is given rise. As he explains,

> (r)eason and imagination agree or harmonize only from within a tension, a contradiction, a painful rending. There is agreement, but it is a discordant concord, a harmony in pain. And it is only pain that makes pleasure possible here. Kant emphasizes this point: the imagination undergoes violence; it seems even to lose its freedom. When the feeling of the sublime is experienced before the formless or deformed in Nature (immensity or power), the imagination can no longer reflect the form of an object. Far from discovering another activity, however, the imagination realizes its very Passion. The imagination has two essential dimensions: successive apprehension, and simultaneous comprehension. If apprehension can reach infinity without trouble, comprehension (an esthetic comprehension independent of any numerical concept) always has a maximum. So it is that the sublime confronts the imagination with this maximum, forces it to reach its limit, and come to grips with its boundaries. The imagination is *pushed to the limits of its power*. But what pushes and constrains the imagination in this way? It is only in appearance, or by projection, that the sublime relates to sensible nature. In reality, reason alone obliges us to unite the infinity of the sensible world in a whole; reason alone forces the imagination to confront its limit. The imagination thus discovers the disproportion of reason, and it is forced to admit that its power is noting compared to a rational Idea."[32]

At the limit of the rational is not only the violent, but the affective: not as reason's "beyond," but as the point of negotiation with *a* beyond, with an exclusion from its set. But if the sublimity of the affective in the Kantian system is on the face of things of the transcendental register, *it is more deeply of the very parameters of the rational itself*: a Bataillean Violence, quivering in, at, and against the threshold of Reason itself.[33] Certainly, the *demands* of Reason still apply, and desperately: the very pleasure of the scene, the pleasure of the violence it enacts but does not present, is born of this tenuous compact. "But," as Daniel W. Smith notes in his translator's introduction to Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*,

> this is where Deleuze breaks with Kant and inverts the critical philosophy. For Deleuze, the faculty of Ideas is no longer identified with Reason; rather, Deleuze posits Ideas within sensibility itself and defines them not by their transcendence to Nature but rather in terms of their immanence to experience itself (the noumenal as immanent). Ideas remain suprasensible, but they now reveal the *forces* or intensities that lie behind sensations, and which draw us into nonhuman or inhuman *becomings*.[34]

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[32] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 61-62.

[33] See Bataille, *The Unfinished Project of Nonknowledge*, 229-231.

[34] Smith, "Deleuze on Bacon: Three Conceptual Trajectories in *The Logic of Sensation*," xxii.

"And yet," Deleuze says, "an agreement *is born* at the heart of this discord." In the productive tension at the core of this dialectic,

> (r)eason confronts the imagination with its own limits in the sensible world; conversely, however, the imagination awakens reason as the faculty able to conceive a supersensible substratum for the infinity of this sensible world. As it undergoes violence, the imagination seems to lose its freedom; but at the same time, the imagination is raised to a transcendental function, taking its own limit as object. Surpassed on every side, the imagination itself surpasses its limits… (…) Right when the imagination, suffering the violence of reason, thought it was losing its freedom, it frees itself from the constraints of the understanding and enters into an agreement with reason to discover what the understanding had kept hidden, namely the suprasensible destination of imagination, which is also like a transcendental origin. In its very Passion, the imagination discovers the origin and the destination of all its activities. This is the lesson of the Analytic and the Sublime: even the imagination has a suprasensible destination. The agreement of the imagination and reason is engendered in discord. Pleasure is engendered in pain."[35]

Certainly, the Shower Scene is not alone in evoking these indeterminacies and affective violences by way of its representational manipulations. The scene of dentistry-torture in *Marathon Man*, the chainsaw-lobotomy in *Scarface* (1983), the crushing of a Vietnamese villager's skull in *Platoon*, the curb-biting in *American History X* (1998), each and all of these scenes are often referred to and recalled in memory as singularly violent and unwatchable despite the fact that in each case the horrendous graphic violence is presentationally speaking absent from the scene. The behavioral tics that manifest themselves in the face of such a promise of unthinkable and unthought violence are telling: the spectator may avert his or her gaze, so as not to scar the memory with a traumatic sight that cannot be erased, but always peeking back, as if compelled by an unspoken liminal dare, and with an equally unspoken assurance that the scene will pull away before the point of no return is reached. The pleasure of these scenes, such as it is, is on the one hand one born of the indeterminacy of presentation and its intersection with one's own zones of indeterminacy, and on the other a fundamentally *masochistic* pleasure – engendering pleasure in pain – that we have already identified as of a piece with the processes of cinematic enunciation and spectatorial engagement in general. The pleasure of masochism, as Deleuze describes it in his monograph on Sacher-Masoch, is the pleasure of the contractual compact itself, the pleasure of a certain agreement between donor and recipient predicated on the dispensation of pain, the pleasure of the willing surrender to a determinate indeterminacy agreed upon in advance, the agreement authorizing the violence as a con-sensual dynamic.

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[35] Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, 62.

In the Shower Scene, then, we have one way in which the image, quite apart from what it shows (and indeed as a consequence of what it refuses to show) enacts and demands a certain violence: a fundamentally masochistic relation wherein the image stages and actualizes a confrontation between the limits of imagination and the limits of reason, a violence that is as much experiential as epistemological, and compounded in bringing these latter two categories into the kind of contact spectacularized relations deny. It is equally a display of the medium's affective capacities, subliminal and sublime, as a call to recognize and surrender to them, an image of the medium's integral violence that also actualizes that violence in its encounter.

PARADIGM I.B: THE PARALLAX TEST

> *The Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be transformed (that we can sometimes call it mild does not contradict its violence: many say that sugar is mild, but to me sugar is violent, and I call it so).*[36]
>
> Roland Barthes
> *Camera Lucida*

> *[The spectacle] isolates all it shows from its context, its past, its intentions and its consequences. It is thus completely illogical. Since no one may contradict it, it has the right to contradict itself, to correct its own past.*[37]
>
> Guy Debord
> *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*

If the Shower Scene opens fundamental questions of the *capacity* of the cinematic image to enact a dialectical and bifurcated violence to subjective imagination (a capacity to both affect and open the field of the affective), the "Parallax Test" sequence in Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974) speaks more directly to the *processes* by which this violence operates, and moreover the conditions under which it is accepted. While the violence of the Parallax Test can also be readily understood by the lines of argumentation advanced in Chapter Two (particularly those regarding the medium's integral and instrumental violence), we might here consider it to the end of not simply shaping or reinflecting a certain subjectivizing relation to violence (the normalization of dissonance and contradiction in an automated, if overpowering, consistency of exchangeability), nor simply of the medium's aptitude and compulsion to do so (the Test as a narcissistic fetishization of the medium's "power on display"). In addition to these, we can understand the Test in this context as a mechanism of unleashing violence in, of, and from imagination – exposing the mechanics of the violent imaginary in motion and process and potentially, terrifyingly, unlocking the violence embedded within the viewing subject – by means of a sequence of semi-autonomous images that demands a determinate hermeneutic engagement.

Certainly, what is notable about this sequence is the degree to which the Test is presented as, simultaneously, a means of sensorial *assault*, instrumental *subjectivization*, and semi-subliminal conceptual and affective *interrogation.* In its setting of still images into motion

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[36] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 91.
[37] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 28. Brackets mine.

– the constellational linearity of the montage amplifying the images' static contents and characteristic force – the end result is as bewildering, overwhelming, and even sublime in its display of cinematic power as the Shower Scene. But the Test, on-screen and off, is above all an instrument of instituting and gathering knowledge, of appraising the subject's capacity to both endure and synthesize the relations to violence that spectacular society demands. In this, the Test is not a form or means of torture *per se* – that is, it is not a means of extracting information by pain of death – so much as a means of consolidating consensus from the information it is designed to confirm, isolate, and gather, posing a question to the subject that is already answered before the fact: "Is this not violence, is this not necessary?" and that can only be answered in one way: "Yes, I agree, I see, I understand."

The conditions of this compact, if not as expressly masochistic as those in the Shower Scene, are inherently monologic, its terms characteristically irrational, and its result – the unleashing of what is presupposed as the tamped will to violence in subservience to the conspiratorial and murderous machinations of the state, countering and breaking free from the repressive machinations of modern life which generally work to disconnect all thought and ideation from action, and all the moreso when these involve a direct engagement with the political and violence – fundamentally illogical. In this, the Parallax Test can be understood as an analogical figuration as much of the cinematic encounter as of spectacular society in general, its patterns of circulation and repetition calling forth Debord's notion that

> (t)he spectacle proves its arguments simply by going round in circles: by coming back to the start, by repetition, by constant reaffirmation in the only space left where anything can be publically affirmed, and believed, precisely because that is the only thing to which everyone is witness."[38]

And as Jameson notes, the violence of these conspiratorially-motivated images is not only of an integral piece of contemporary modalities of power and desire, but from these also of the contemporary politics of consumption:

> (T)he testing sequences in *The Parallax View*, like its predecessor in the programming sequences of *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), comments on image society and advertising fully as much as it hints at darker sources of manipulation and control; the deck here is shuffled differently than in *Videodrome*, where commodities (television programs and/or pornography) stood in for political conspiracy. Here the fact of consumption is underscored by discontinuity; narrativity is deliberately interrupted by the insertion of still photographic images which are then

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[38] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 19.

> renarrativized on a second level by the suggestive music that forges them into an allegory of good and evil, family and country versus the enemy, the heroic comic-book persona of the avenging hero, and the pathos of rich an poor, ins and outs, in an oscillation finally becoming so fast as to endow the positive presidential images with the quotient of loathing associated with 'evil' Nazi and communist leaders.[39]

In this regard, what is perhaps most notable about this sequence is not the montage itself, its mad shuffling of images in a simultaneous display and enactment of power, but rather the bookends of its encounter within the narrative, the warm directive welcoming of the unseen test-administrator, and the dumb complicity of Joseph Frady's (Warren Beatty) interaction: he enters, sits, observes, absorbs, rises, and exits – all in silence, *expressionless and mesmerized*, a Jamesonian figure of the affectless surrender to forces of technologization. This expressionless quality is formally augmented: as the Test runs its course, we are not privy to Frady's reactions by way of conventional, individuating and individualizing reaction shots which would guide our own individuated and individualized responses to these images – we witness, as he witnesses, *as he* – and the effect of the sequence, witnessed by one the same as by all, is uniformly hypnotic, uniformly anesthetizing: an overwhelmed state of queasy admiration of the mutability of these images, arranged for and articulated to us, *a resignation to the process* of the images' shufflings and unfoldings, an acceptance, mute and muted, of the monologic force of the images – *even though the process is perfectly clear.* Most critically, what this process entails is not a generalized desensitization *to* violent images, but the uniform and procedural desensitizing power *of* images, in general, that girds and gilds spectacular society: the power to codify concepts and percepts, with the effect of producing only codified, shunted, and constrained affects.

Here, Debord's claims that in the domain of the spectacle "these images can tolerate anything and everything," and moreover that "since no one may contradict it, it has the right to contradict itself, to correct its own past,"[40] are particularly resonant: in terms of both their discrete matter and juxtaposition, the capacity of the *flow* of images to forge, reinflect, and reify whatever meanings necessary, and moreover to evoke and direct whatever affects necessary, is on display in this sequence. In this process, even Hitler is simultaneously respectacularized and banalized – the image of Hitler and all that image represents (spectacular ideology included) effectively neutered in becoming both a circulated image-commodity and a universal signifier, as a clichéd, even quaint, image of evil, risen from the terrifying "banality of evil" to the more commonplace evil of banality – depending upon what the Test needs to evoke in its viewer, at a given moment or in additive effect.

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[39] Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 61-62.

[40] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 28.

This sequence and its machinic deployment of images thus goes far beyond a canny revelation of the medium's capacity for the politicized arbitration of arbitrary signifiers, be they pictorial (crying woman, nude couple, stacks of cash, the White House, cartoon *Übermensch*, and so forth), or textual-connotational ("god," "nation," "happiness," "love," "me") in its relentlessly cyclical, systematized, and depersonalized flow. Indeed, the cinema's ontological obsession with violence – and particularly its own – comes into the foreground here, informing the sequence's monologic force as a celebratory image of the medium's integral violence: the narcissistic intensity of its focus not simply on images of violence, but on the entirety of the montage it creates *as a violent image*, is so overwhelming that it simply *can't* cut away. Yet in presenting the sequence as if *in situ*, as a neutral but overpowering field operating (in Debord's words, again) "entirely independent(ly) of what the spectator might understand or think of it," its ideological project is laid more bare, and in so doing made more troublesome, than had the more conventional route (specifically, showing Frady's reactions, whatever they might be, clearly and unambiguously) been taken.

Here, then, the primacy of form of presentation over whatever content in representation takes on a different modality than in the Shower Scene. In both cases, the images and their arrangement constitute a demand on reason and the synthetic faculty of imagination that can only be answered in one logical or rational way: in the case of the Psycho: "this woman is being torn to shreds, in ways too terrible to show, but that I must imagine"; in the case of the Parallax Test: "the pathological mind that can accommodate these conceptual connections and slippages is precisely the pathological mind of conspiratorial power, precisely the pathology of image-culture itself, precisely *my own pathology and its constitutive processes reflected back to me, confronting me, calling me back*." Whereas the former appeals to objective fact and takes the form of the demands of *torture*, the latter opens up a field of what might be called *Socratic interrogation*: a seductive, teasing operation that privileges the individual's preexisting knowledge in order to reshape it, that feigns disinterest and ignorance in order to advance a predetermined agenda, that presents its desired ends in the guise of canny revelation and the subjugating image of purposeful empowerment.

The violence of the Parallax Test can thus be understood in two related ways: in its Foucauldian disciplinary-subjectivizing function – that is, a discursive and epistemological function – and in the ways in which its conceptual-perceptual machinations and reformations give rise to a peculiar affective response in the face of the sublimity of technological power – that is, the power of not only of the images at play, but of the spectacle itself as a mode of relation and identity between the subject and the image. The latter violence, as Jameson explains, extends and modifies the former:

> It is a potential transformation whose dimensions can be read in the very ambiguities of the word 'image', which had not yet seemed appropriate for the acts of vision celebrated either in Sartre or in Foucault, but which now suddenly (as in Guy Debord's great book, *The Society of the Spectacle*, where it is announced that "the image is the final form of commodity reification") imposes itself everywhere, at the same time that it insistently begins to designate a technological origin. This is then the paradoxical outcome of the Foucauldian moment of the bureaucratic eye, which, in the very process of revealing the intimate connection between seeing and measurement or knowledge, suddenly turns out to posit the media as such (and in retrospect the now only too familiar Foucauldian emblem of the panopticon reveals itself as a first form of the media as well). For in our time, it is technology and the media which are the true bearers of the epistemological function: whence a mutation in cultural production in which traditional forms give way to mixed-media experiments, and photography, film, and television all begin to seep into the visual work of art (and the other arts as well) and to colonize it, generating high-tech hybrids of all kinds, from installations to computer art.[41]

This passage links two crucial considerations: first, the return of modes of power from an imaginary or an invisibility into a universal visibility and unapologetic transparency of its means – that is, power, once again, triumphantly on display in all its awesome sublimity – and second, Jameson's aforementioned lament of the primacy of the technological in contemporary power relations and its consequences for aesthetic, political, and affective potentialities. Indeed, for Jameson, it is with this centrality of the image to economies and modes of power that

> the Foucauldian moment begins to give way to a third stage, which it is appropriate to identify with postmodernity as such. Everything that was paranoid about Foucault's total system or Robbe-Grillet's compulsive enumerations vanishes away, to make room for a euphoria of high technology proper, a celebratory affirmation of some post-McLuhanite vision of culture transmogrified by computers and cyberspace. Now suddenly a hitherto baleful universal visibility that seemed to

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[41] Jameson, "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity," *The Cultural Turn*, 110.

> brook no utopian alternative is welcomed and reveled in for its own sake: this is the true moment of image society, in which human subjects henceforth exposed (according to Paul Willis) to bombardments of up to a thousand images a day (at the same time that their formerly private lives are thoroughly reviewed and scrutinized, itemized, measured and enumerated, in data banks) being to live a very different relationship to space and time, to existential experience as well as to cultural consumption.[42]

In its disclosure of the power of images (and, here, to the explicitly violent ends of affective manipulation), the sequence demonstrates the degree to which perception and sensation are bound; moreover, in each circulating reorganization, with each disjunct introduced in the juxtapositions of images, it simultaneously renders those images as interchangeable and exchangeable quantities while inducing a certain indeterminacy in their recombination (the violence of the fixity of the photograph Barthes describes above both contributing to this quality and disturbed by it). The Parallax Test, perhaps even moreso than the Shower Scene, is an image of perception, an *affection-image* in Bergsonian-Deleuzian terms: an affect that "surges in the centre of indetermination, that is to say in the subject, between a perception which is troubling in certain respects and a hesitant action … a coincidence of subject and object, or the way in which the subject perceives itself, or rather experiences itself or feels itself 'from the inside'," an image that "marks the coincidence of the subject and the object in a pure quality."[43] In fact, apart from any particular move or connection made within the sequence of images, the sequence itself constitutes an objective image of spectacular power, turning the latter's objectivizing force against itself in a new perception and conceptualization of the terrible sublimity of power, and from this potentially actualizing a new relation thereto in sensations of dread. In the end, the Parallax Test constitutes not a misrecognition of that power, or worse, a mechanism of mere false consciousness, but an implicit acknowledgement, even something of a verboten *admission* of the relations between power, violence, and the subject, a revelation that, unguided by any means other than what this spectacular procession presents, treads terrible, dangerous ground, providing both sensations of sublimity in the face of power and the terror of reason pushed to – and past – its limits. An analogon to the spectacle itself, what these images potentially cannot tolerate is precisely that with which they also cannot dispense: the sublime intensity of feeling not only borne by these specific images, but born of their calculated arrangement to explicitly and unapologetically violent ends.

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[42] Jameson, "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity," *The Cultural Turn*, 110-111.
[43] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 65.

PARADIGM II.A: THE LUDOVICO TECHNIQUE (BURGESS)

> *The individual who has been more deeply marked by this impoverished spectacular thought than by* any other aspect of his experience *puts himself at the service of the established order right from the start, even though subjectively he may have had quite the opposite intention. He will essentially follow the language of the spectacle, for it is the only one he is familiar with; the one in which he learned to speak. No doubt he would like to be regarded as an enemy of its rhetoric; but he will use its syntax. This is one of the most important aspects of spectacular domination's success. (...) The swift disappearance of our former vocabulary is merely one moment in this process. It helps it along.*[44]
>
> Guy Debord
> *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*

The constellation of processes surrounding the subject's cinematically-conditioned affective relations to images of violence – revulsion, expectation, anticipation, internalization, resignation, gratification – emerges most clearly in Anthony Burgess' 1962 novel A Clockwork Orange, and to a somewhat different (but equally significant) end in Stanley Kubrick's 1971 filmic adaptation. Of the many infamously violent sequences that episodically structure the novel and film alike, the application and subsequent effects of the "Ludovico Technique," as both an allegorical model for spectacular subjectivation and (in the case of the film) an active extension of its own principles, is certainly the most instructive in how these constellational valences come to bear on the question of the affective violences of the cinematic image.

The Technique, on the face of things, is a more or less simple exercise in subjective programming, not unlike the processes of display, projection, and internalization that constitute Jameson's post-Foucauldian theses on panoptic disciplinarity and that we have observed in the Parallax Test. On both page and screen, it is somewhat pedantically presented as a form of state-sanctioned, corrective aversion-therapy, schizophrenically framed as at once an indictment and celebration of post-war, liberal-democratic juridicial-punitive systems and the power of images and image society to mould the reactions and responses of its subjects as both docile bodies and conscientious observers.[45]

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[44] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 31. Emphases his.

[45] In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary distinguishes the term "observer" from "viewer" and "spectator," in an etymological examination of the root *observare*, which literally means "to conform one's actions, to comply with." (6) What this establishes for Crary is an operative definition of vision which is *not* boundless, free, or autonomous vis-à-vis the subject, but rather as a category of conditioning, located and functioning within a prescribed set of normative and normalizing conditions and conventions. However, insofar as "observer" also

The process by which the Technique is administered is similarly simple: the "violent subject" (here, an iteration of the Althusserian "bad subject," whose relation to normative interpellative structures in general, and those coming to bear on violence in particular, is deemed dangerous or inappropriate) undergoes a series of episodic "treatments": each one, the subject is told upon its completion, being "almost the last one," with the last characteristically deferred and determined by the technicians without prior disclosure to the subject. Each "treatment session" consists of the subject being strapped into a chair facing a screen, eyelids held open and head braced so he cannot look or turn away. A serum is injected, which facilitates a violent psychosomatic reaction to the images played on screen: images *of* violence, both staged-represented ("properly" cinematic images: deliberate simulacra) and historical-documentarian (Nazi rallies; tanks, planes, and troops in formation; the smoky ruins of liquidated ghettoes). The images increase in frequency and intensity, and, working in conjunction with the serum's catalytic fusion of the mind's processing of images and the body's processing of damaging sensory input, create a physiological response of nausea, panic, and ultimately paralyzing horror: revulsion by and through association and identification, inversion of specular and spectacular pleasure and desire, and ideological engineering custom-fit to the pleasures, aberrant and otherwise, of the ocularly arrested and enraptured subject. Here, programmatic torture and affective reprogramming are combined, administered through the eyes in their ownmost form and mode of comprehension.

In Burgess's novel, the Ludovico Technique is only sketchily described (from the perspective of its, and the novel's, subject and "humble narrator," Alex de Large) as a means less of deprogramming and dissolving the subject's drives to violence than of reprogramming and sublimating those drives into a set of socially productive impetuses, actions, and desires. In short, its end to reconstitute its subject in the ideal-image of the bourgeois subject: rejecting and turning away from violence, but in the limited and self-serving fashion of Odysseus lashed to the bow of his own ship (as marvelously evoked by Adorno and Horkheimer), savoring violence not as a way of life or mode of existence but from a space apart and against, objectifying and abjectifying it in active and constitutive consciousness, banishing it from the gestural repertoire even as a means of self-preservation,

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connotes an *active relation to the visual* (as opposed to the passivity of "spectatorship," for example), there also remains the possibility of resistance, a possibility which Crary explores as the "problem of the observer" against which the titual "techniques" are set to solve.

and in turn channeling those energies into the more "mature" (though perhaps, in the final analysis, no less brutal) endeavors of productive labor and relentless self-mastery. By the final chapter – crucially, perhaps tactically excised from American editions of the text until 1986 – we learn that Alex, despite a seeming return to his former self and ways, has with time become sufficiently reprogrammed by the very nature of civilized life itself, and moreover by his shift into bourgeois society when all his unfocused, youthful energy and ideation have been exhausted. As Burgess notes in his introduction to the unexpurgated edition,

> (s)enseless violence is a prerogative of youth, which has much energy but little talent for the constructive. Its dynamism has to find an outlet in smashing telephone kiosks, derailing trains, stealing cars and smashing them and, of course, in the much more satisfactory activity of destroying human beings. There comes a time, however, when violence is seen as juvenile and boring. It is the repartee of the stupid and ignorant. My young hoodlum comes to the revelation of the need to get something done in life – to marry, beget children, to keep the orange of the world turning in the rookers of Bog, or hands of God, and perhaps even create something – music, say. (…) It is with a kind of shame that this growing youth looks back on his devastating past. He wants a different kind of future.[46]

No longer "a product of his former environment" and now precisely the product of another, Alex finds himself self-resigned, self-reprogrammed, and, in the process, mendaciously self-identified and self-determined. Dread civilizing morality creeps in and takes hold; the past must be extinguished, relegated to distant and irrecoverable memory as a glorious, transcendentally pure, yet cautionary cipher: "But you, O my brothers, remember sometimes thy little Alex that was. Amen. And all that cal."[47]

Through the Technique, these images of violence – mobilized as *instruments of counterviolence* – have themselves forcibly exorcised, tamped down, and flattened Alex's violent energies, both present and potential, destructive and revolutionary; the broader, more insidious and sustained pressures of his intervening and now ambivalently embraced social being have done the rest: the images, in other words, are here perhaps an insufficient means to such a transformation in themselves, but have certainly left a sufficient scar, in the form of conscience, at which this social being picks, infecting him. In sum, Burgess' iteration is the very image of a dialectical economicity: one excess (libidinal pleasure) countered by its transformation into its opposite (reflexive revulsion), reconciled in a middle ground that retains the intensity of neither polarity. In the redirection of those energies into the sanctioned bourgeois pursuits of the "good subject" in all its (ac)quiescent docility – and quite contrary to the more didactic and mytho-affirmative messages of "moral change," "growth and maturity," and holistic, constructive "being for the world" that Burgess's reinstated chapter and authorial comments thereon (quite unsubtly) pound down like the last nail in a coffin – we can still nonetheless clearly see, seeping from the cracks of this message's *intente noblesse*, a far more sinister conclusion to be drawn: that in the aporia such a concept of violence is founded upon, all creation, all love, all of civilized life and of the category of the individual as productive member of the whole, grows as much from forsaking violence as from being subjected to it, and as much this as from redirecting violence both innate and received: creation as the repository of violence, violence as the genetic code and motivation for creation itself, thus both tainting creation with its trace while compelling it forward and requiring its discursive and experiential renunciation, its removal from the equation in the thought of creation and civilization alike.

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[46] Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, vii-viii.
[47] Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, 192.

Ultimately, in Burgess' text the Technique produces the essence of the ideality of the bourgeois relation to violence discussed in the previous chapter: a concomitant compulsion to submit to, renounce, but also always and vigilantly recognize violence as an omnipresent threat to psychic and somatic well-being. But something rather more interesting occurs in this movement: initially, Alex cannot *not* see, nor not react to, violence anywhere and everywhere; he cannot but be confronted with its kernel in every gesture and pleasure, even in the more positively registered liminal abandonments of music and sex, and through resocialization he learns to accept these as a condition of his inclusion in the social contract; the violence once *expressed in and as individuality* is now *mutely registered* in the very process of socially-determined and self-alienating *individuation* as a continuing project of re-formation. Jameson, paraphrasing Adorno's overriding sentiment of the generally violent conditions of modern alienation, marks this movement as clear, ineffable, and tragic – and also coming to bear on matters of the sensory, the bodily, the affective:

> (W)hat we think of as individuality in the West, and what seems to us somehow to trace the outlines of an essential human nature, is little more than the marks or scars, the violent compressions, resulting from the interiorization by so-called civilized human beings of that instinct for self-preservation without which, in this

> fallen society or history, we would all be destroyed as surely as those unfortunates who are born without a tactile warning sense of hot and cold, or pain and pleasure, in their secondary nervous systems.[48]

To wit, in the dialogue from Kubrick's translation of Burgess' novel presented in opening, Alex quite directly states the degree of compromise and institutional violence he is willing to accept and endure so that he might again become a "free individual," speaking before the fact of undergoing the Technique itself to the resignation to such violence that is always-already at stake, naïvely not comprehending the impossibility of its promise being made good. His words bear repeating: "It seemed a bit crazy to me, but I let them get on with what they wanted to get on with. *If I was to be a free malchick again in a fortnight's time, I would put up with much in the meantime*, O my brothers." Now happier to turn the other cheek than to counter the violences exercised against him, accepting some and distancing himself from others, Alex too becomes another cog in the clockwork, not simply resigned, but an operative part of a generalized economy of violence that would, and could, never be named as such. And in Burgess' text, that complicity is celebrated, condoned in an image of a world without violence that is intimately correlated to a subject without feeling or the expressive means of self-determination.

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[48] Jameson, "Utopia, Modernism, and Death," *The Seeds of Time*, 99. Adorno and Horkheimer present this peculiar distinction between individuality and individuation as follows in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception": "The principle of individuality was always full of contradiction. Individuation has never really been achieved. Self-preservation in the shape of class has kept everyone at the stage of a mere species being. Every bourgeois characteristic, in spite of its deviation and indeed because of it, expressed the same thing: the harshness of competitive society. The individual who supported society bore its disfiguring mark; seemingly free, he was actually the product of its economic and social apparatus. Power based itself on the prevailing conditions of power when it sought the approval of persons affected by it. As it progressed, bourgeois society did also develop the individual. Against the will of its leaders, technology has changed human beings into persons. However, every advance in individuation of this kind took place at the expense of the individuality in whose name it occurred, so that nothing was left but the resolve to pursue one's own particular purpose. The bourgeois whose existence is split into a business and a private life, whose private life is split into keeping up his public image and intimacy, whose intimacy is split into the surly partnership of marriage and the bitter comfort of being quite alone, at odds with himself and everybody else, is already virtually a Nazi, replete both with enthusiasm and abuse; or a modern city-dweller who can now only imagine friendship as a 'social contact': that is, as being in social contract with others with whom he has no inward contact." (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 155)

PARADIGM II.B: THE LUDOVICO TECHNIQUE (KUBRICK)

> *(T)he image has ceased to be sensory-motor. (...) Now this sensory-motor break finds its condition at a higher level and itself comes back to a break between man and the world. The sensory-motor break makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought. Between the two, thought undergoes a strange fossilization, which is as it were its powerlessness to function, to be, its dispossession of itself and the world. For it is not in the name of a better or truer world that thought captures the intolerable in this world, but, on the contrary, it is because this world is intolerable that it can no longer think a world or think itself. The intolerable is no longer a serious injustice, but the permanent state of everyday banality. Man* is not himself *a world other than the one in which he experiences the intolerable and feels himself trapped.*[49]
>
> Gilles Deleuze
> *Cinema II: The Time-Image*

> *The enjoyment of the violence suffered by the movie characters turns into violence against the spectator, and distraction into exertion. Nothing that the experts have devised as a stimulant must escape the weary eye; no stupidity is allowed in the face of all the trickery; one has to follow everything and even display the smart responses shown and recommended in the film.*[50]
>
> Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer
> "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"

By slight but stark contrast of effect and ends, Kubrick's 1971 interpretation of the novel (which, as Burgess himself lamented, was based upon the truncated American edition[51]) renders the affective flattening and repressive process of individuation Jameson delineates far more explicit in its exact mechanics and more legible in its cine-sophical consequences: indeed, the Ludovico Technique for Kubrick becomes a metaphor for the cinema itself. In so doing, Kubrick supplements Burgess' text in three ways: first, by indicting not only those processes whereby ideal individuality becomes real individuation, but also the cinema's centrality to such processes, implicating not only textual systems and superstructural machines, but the totality of the image-subject encounter in a vicious, circular pathology; second, by highlighting the commodity character of that encounter as the linchpin and lever for these processes; and third, by actualizing and making-legible the affective structure of image-violence described in the text in such a way that the latter's speculative allegorization of that violence traverses its cold didacticism into a spectatorial encounter that affectively mirrors and extends the effects of the Technique itself. In each of these ways, and especially the last, Kubrick's iteration demonstrates both the affective qualities that distinguish a violent image from an image of violence and the degree to which that line is not so clearly cut, if indeed cut at all.

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[49] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 169-170. Emphases his.

[50] Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 138-139.

[51] As Burgess notes of Kubrick's film, "There is no hint of this change of intention in the twentieth chapter. The boy is conditioned, then deconditioned, and he foresees with glee a resumption of the operation of free and violent will. 'I was cured all right,' he says, and so the American book ends. So the film ends too. The twenty-first chapter gives the novel the quality of genuine fiction, an art founded on the principle that human beings change. (...) When a fictional work fails to show change, when it merely indicates that human character is set, stony, unregenerable, then you are out of the field of the novel and into that of the fable or the allegory. The American or Kubrickian *Orange* is a fable; the British or world one is a novel." (*A Clockwork Orange*, viii) In this admonition, however, Burgess in fact legitimizes Kubrick's decision (after all, as an American expatriate and British citizen filming the motion picture in Britain, he undoubtedly had knowledge of and access to Burgess' "intended" text): not only because the novel and the cinema necessarily different in kind and in function, but also, as Jameson argues throughout a number of his works, because the cinema is a mechanism that plays integrally on not only allegorical figurations, but also in fomenting allegorical thought.

During the Ludovico sequences, which *present* precisely the same kinds of images and arrangements *described* in the novel, we are better able to *witness* – and, in a way that only the medium can afford, *experience* – the play between the "mere image" of violence and the violence that such images, and especially if instrumentally directed and compounded in sequence, may enact. In this visualization of the Technique, there are several layers of violence explicitly on display, beyond the violence in (or even *of*) the images shown to Alex: the violence of the technicians as they perform the Technique upon Alex; the de facto legitimacy of institutional/sovereign violence that before the fact permits the practitioners to do their work; the violence of the juxtaposition between the beauty of the soundtrack and the terror both of and evinced by the represented acts; the violence of the images themselves as they barrage and bludgeon Alex; the violence of Alex's reaction against the images and the affects they provoke; the violence of the sequence itself, *as episode*, upon the viewing subject both through and apart from Alex – *himself* an image undergoing violence to and for *our* eyes – as a figural-textual conduit and sadomasochistically identificatory locus that inhabits and exploits the fundamental relays and tensions between pleasure and pain, violence and satisfaction that inhere in every cinematic presentation, of violence or otherwise. Each violence reacting against the others, the indeterminacies reach a kind of critical mass; the sequence is thoroughly catastrophic to the violent imaginary, and irreconcilable to any neatly codified affective ends: horror, pleasure, ennoblement, sympathy, revulsion, compassion, anticipation, and dread all commingled and confounded.

A characteristic schizophrenia arises: in place of Alex's desire to turn away, the viewing subject not only does not or cannot, but is *simultaneously compelled and permitted* to remain fixated and gratified; at the same time, the identification with not only Alex but his situation cannot but reveal both the violence necessary to the cinematic encounter (the subject undergoing a certain sensorial-affective programming, determined from and by the outside) and that subject's complicity in the process (all little Alexes, learning as much, or as little, as he does by "freely undergoing" the same procedural violence). The multiple registers and *enregistrements* of violence so clear in Kubrick's visualization compel us to address these processes in ways that not only implicate unilinearly deterministic political or ideological ends, but also the unwitting but integral complicity of the subject to these ends, and particularly vis-à-vis the structure of consumer consciousness as it intersects with violence: the subject's very desires always-already conditioned and molded as means to those ends, a complicity without which the means could not function as such: a mobilized iteration of Cornel West's concept of "coercive deference" – to evoke Lewis Carroll, more or less "liking what you get," if not in any substantive way "getting what you'd like" – in a complex and even more complexly justified conditioning of the actually or potentially violent subject into the subject of violence in a movement analogous to that from producer to consumer, from agential subject to subjectivized object.

The potential violence of these images, then, lies absolutely in the medium's ability to subsume them into narratological and affective paradigms that organize their force in such a way that can be integrated back, inexorably, into the totality of consumer consciousness. Indeed, Alex's ultimate transformation – and moreover the conditions and preconditions of that transformation, however brief in its duration – would be far less remarkable, and markedly less subversive, if we were to ignore the fact that both his general relation and specific impulses to violence are deeply rooted as much in his resistance to the forces of bourgeois society as in his wholesale habitation of it. Highlighting this character is Kubrick's second crucial supplement to Burgess, and one that allows his visualization of the Technique and its effects to not only transcend the dour (and politically ambivalent) "social realism" of Burgess' concluding gesture and reopen its sentiments as an explicit allegory of the violence of contemporary image culture, but moreover to reopen questions of how the status of the image as commodity constitutes the fundamental nexus at which an image (of violence, but moreover of anything) may or may not become "truly violent."

This character is made all the more literal in the film vis-à-vis Alex's relation to music, specifically his beloved "Ludwig Van," and that music's necessary relation to his violent actions. The scene in the record shop, where Alex browses for music and women, provides the link: with its snarky self-advert of the *2001: A Space Odyssey* soundtrack – classical music as intermedial, synergistic commodity – conflated with Alex's shopping for objects – women and music alike, interchangeable conduits – upon and through which he can unleash and express his libidinal force, it is less that the sublimity of music unleashes his sublime excesses of sexual and violent insatiability than the purchase, consumption, and internalization of that catalyst in commodity form, the reified thrill of experiencing this music-commodity at leisure and at will (the will to leisure, and the expression of will that leisure itself, alone, permits) as much an instrument of consumption as the drug-laden milk he drinks, and *already* as much a piece of bourgeois society as the anonymous middle-class dwelling in which he comfortably resides and which (if only to a certain point) shields him from all suspicion and punishment for his crimes.[52] Only when that commodity character is recognized and destabilized in the Ludovico Technique – as a source of discomfort and discomfiture rather than a means to pleasurable ends – can Alex be "deprogrammed" (however much the "reprogramming," as we will see, is a different matter). Thus, in Kubrick's Ludovico sequences – with their many folds of self-critical, metacinematic irony unfolding on layers of immanent paradoxes and zones of indistinction that Deleuze would rightly call philosophical – we witness here as in Burgess a movement from illicit, excessive, unproductive consumption and expenditure of energies (onanistic "ends in themselves," from orgasms to headtrips to murders, or in other words, the image of Bataille's overestimated pure or wasteful expenditures) to a productive mode of being: a more "refined" end, and refined from the very same means.

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[52] In Burgess, violence is equated with the childlike, uncivilized and unformed: in many ways, with the presubjective as such. But in Kubrick, as we will argue presently, Alex is *already part of the bourgeois machinery*, and must by the end confront and overcome its traces to ascend as much to the status of a Nietzschean–Bataillean *Übermensch* as to a Lukácsian proletariat consciousness (and in a certain sense, remarkably enough positing the latter as the precondition for the former); in this way most strongly, Kubrick counters the affirmative utopianism of Burgess' text, and even its ambivalent politicality that itself constitutes precisely the same resignation to violence that marks its concluding statements.

That Alex is essentially "force-fed" these images is also significant: insofar as Alex cannot move or turn away (that is, cannot deny what is being served, as the sinister counterpart to Chaplin's "modern man" strapped into a mad feeding-machine cramming essential nutrition down his throat), the forceful monologism of the cinematic encounter with violence is in its own way *more* explicitly, and certainly less ambivalently, rendered than in the Parallax Test. The implicit critique preferred in the Parallax Test is made explicit and twofold in this miniaturized allegory: both that Alex is forced into and forcefully held in the subject-position of the ideal cinematic spectator, dutifully bound to the events unspooling before him, and coextensively with this, that the parameters of *any* given mode of consumption (as "taste," as "preference," as "*productive*"), and specifically of the cinematic variety, is determined by and predicated on an individuating violence that is as much econo-politically conspiratorial as facilitated, enacted, and authorized by the characteristic force of the images themselves. The point, ultimately, is not that Alex (and the audience) must not entertain *any* commodity relationship with violence whatsoever, but that he must entertain a *certain productive relationship with violence as commodity*, as a distant object alienated from experience that in turn further alienates from experience, that reconstitutes, redirects, and imaginarily fulfills a once-real complex of desires, that gives rise and stands in relation to determined and limited affects.

What is clearest in Kubrick's film is that Alex understands and inhabits this relationship already; his relation to violence (indeed, to all relations) is purely and "properly" cinematic, as is his identification with images. Like Clyde, his 'movie-consciousness' is deeply embedded into his very being, and to the extent that it fully informs his consciousness and enactments of violence against others: from his evocation of Gene Kelly in the film's early home-invasion/rape sequence to his appraisal of the quality of the films he views by their relative verisimilitude to his hyperrealistic experience of the violent, the world is but a screen for his blissful habitation. In so many ways, Alex is already the ideal spectacular subject – save one: the translation of image and ideation into action. In this, he exemplifies Baudrillard's spectacular-simulacral *command* to "(t)ake your desires for reality!" – the "ultimate slogan of power ... in a nonreferential world," where "even the confusion of the reality principle and the principle of desire is less dangerous than contagious hyperreality"[53] –

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[53] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 22.

but in such a way that takes the spectacle's *demand* of unceasing interchangeability very much, *too much*, at its word: he thus inverts that command, making reality the hyperrealized field in which he fulfills his essential desires.

For Alex, the ideal-affectational schema is also inverted: unaffected by any extrinsic normalizing force and immune to anything *but* the force of his own desires and the potentialities of the pleasurable, his power to act is unlimited. The problem to be solved by the administration of the Ludovico Technique lies not in Alex's dearth or absence of affect, but of *proper affects*, less his translation of ideation into action, but *the quality of his reactions*. Before the Technique, Alex represents a failure of the "proper codification" of affects: his is a pure and onanistic surplus of pleasurable sensation and polymorphous desire. After undergoing the Technique, Alex's surplus of affect(ation) renders all feeling, all connection to the world (however codified or normatively permitted) lifeless, dead, mute, and intolerable. His attempt at suicide (which, in freeing him from these determinations, precipitates a mythic rebirth) is as much a product of the reinversion of these affects (all sensations as, at worst, viscerally unpleasurable) as it is of that narcotizing blunting of affect Jameson describes as characteristic of all subjects properly conditioned to the terms of image culture. But even in his regenerative "return to origins" – perhaps especially because of it – he retains utility for the state, because as a suicidal melancholiac, he is even less useful than as a hooligan: not only because he stands as evidence of the failure and the violence of the state's gestures toward social normalization (a problem of public relations, essentially), but also because he offers no useful or appropriable affects (even as a criminal acting on his own desires, he can sustain the law through a certain *productivity*; as a brooding melancholiac, he offers nothing of *value*).

What the Technique's affective "correction" entails in Kubrick's iteration is at once profoundly ideological and significantly more complex than a forced process of linear sublimation and substitution, whereby one set of drives is alchemically and economically transubstantiated into another, more acceptable set of desires, as the dispassionately Pavlovian character of the Technique as presented in the novel might suggest. This transformation consists of a profound yet slippery negotiation, not simply of "desires" but of the very means of desiring itself, the ways in which these means can be returned to their intended ends, a negotiation that necessarily entails Foucauldian dynamics of power and knowledge in the intrinsically *interrogative* processes of subjectivation.[54]

Alex's transformation, then, relies as much on the direct enactment of force qua torture that "deprograms" him as the interrogative character of his subjection to the power behind and beyond that force: it is only once *both* Alex *and* the technicians understand the place of and relation to violence, in and as image, that any reprogramming can occur. Dr. Brodsky's reaction to realizing Alex's love of Beethoven during the second, decisive Ludovico sequence is crucial: a "eureka moment" where the overseer realizes, but barely registers, that this music and the sensations it evokes for Alex is the key to unlocking and understanding his subject. This interrogation, not entirely unlike that in the Parallax Test, is carried out less to discover *what* Alex – and by extension, the audience – knows, desires, and feels in the face of violence, but *how* he knows, desires, and feels, in order to use it against him in a socially productive theatre of cruelty, the point being to supplant his mastery of his own structure of knowledge and desire with one that, while not intrinsically different, can establish a proper balance – a proper *economy* – between his operative structure of knowledge and desire and that external to him. Before being subject to the Technique (and indeed, this perhaps is why it backfires so horribly), Alex knows *too much* about the relations of power, violence, and desire, and moreover of the image to each, not implicitly or unconsciously (as is the case of the ideal-bourgeois subject), but directly, openly, and unapologetically, to a degree that an excess of objectivity, rationality, and rationalization precludes any "proper" affective response, and that knowledge can and must only be made useful by subjecting him *to* it, in an alienating homeopathy, in and with full force, as the arrested, immobilized, narcotized, and unwilling recipient of spectacular violence. By confronting himself with himself, by making himself fully other to himself, his very drives, desires, and knowledge alienated, Alex is less deprogrammed by a subtractive or desensitizing process than short-circuited, *affectively hypersensitized*, his organic machinery overwhelmed by another, its simulacrum: the spectacle and the cinema alike as clockwork oranges, molding his actions, his ideations, his desires, and his affects in their image, to their images, and *through their images*.

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[54] To clarify, interrogation is the mobilization of knowledge in the service of enacting and withholding violence, the interrogator's knowledge acting as a lever upon the subject's; this is also the point at which knowledge enters the political, both as instrumental (a means to an end) and as representation (representation of knowledge and face/representation of force). Moreover, interrogation, even divorced from the acts or ends of physical torture, is fundamentally a structure of unequal exchange that operates analogously to that of capitalism: violence given for knowledge, death or release (both conflated as equivalents) held as rewards for surrender, all operating under an excessive deployment of excessive means with the possibility of the end deferred to an ambiguous, unknown, and (from the side of power, eschewing its ostensible sensible efficacy) arbitrary end: the point at which the exercise of power becomes an end in itself, apart from and beyond the goal of extracting the necessary information. And critically, interrogation must also be carried out in isolation, and moreover "out of sight," in secrecy: a characteristic the cinema both represents and replicates, not only in its texts (that is, when interrogation is presented as part of a narrative), but also in the means by which its texts are exhibited (the closed and insulated space of the auditorium). Screams may be heard behind the closed doors, but the doors, the access to the means of power to extract its necessary information, are closed (the opacity of the means preserved, as the projector in its secret booth): this maxim is literalized in the closing of the doors and cutting to external spaces in the torture sequences in *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and even in Alan Parker's sadistic and xenophobic paean to the brutality of the other *Midnight Express* (1978), where the Western victims of the Turkish prison-guard's torture disappear from the scene and return wounded and broken.

In Kubrick's visualization, then, the Ludovico Technique is ultimately as much a mechanism of conceptual-affective deprogramming and reprogramming as a direct indictment of what these respective processes entail: the torture that is always inherent *in and beyond* processes of interrogation and subjectivation, the discursive *and* affective violence inherent in creating the docile, observant body by way of the power of images acting through and upon it. This is essentially where the demarcation between this film's sequences of violent images and that within *The Parallax View* lies: in essence, the latter only attends a specific mode of interrogation, a seemingly blind and ambivalent probing into the capacity of a given subject to be subject to its own arrangements and reshuffling of the image-affect deck, the result as a key to unlocking and unleashing already-present inner drives. While this certainly can be recognized as the most insidious face of spectacular manipulation – faceless, opaque, benign – the Parallax Test ultimately exhibits few insights into the *enduring violence of the process* beyond its techno-pulp conspiratoricity: there, the Test is administered, the drives are unlocked, and the vile deeds of distant power are carried out by unwitting and ultimately disposable hands. As a complementary mirror-image of these ends, the Ludovico Technique posits a more enduring structure of torture and interrogation: the end of the interrogation is torture, not the means, and that end perpetually plays out without end. Not unlike the traumatized Paul Kersey in *Death Wish*, erupting in waves of anguish and rage upon seeing photos of his shattered family's happier times that are equal to and equated with those feelings evoked upon realizing their violation, Alex now undergoes the most terrible and ineffable involuntary reaction to even the most non-violent images and experiences (or, at the very least, those that are coded as such). In his being unable to not see and experience the violence in and of even the most banal and acceptable scenarios, there is a final reversal, or final turn of the screw, in the violence to imagination: not only that the cinema calls forth the unthinkable, the distasteful, and the horrifying, but that the world entire may as well, demanding it in every encounter, in every action, in every thought, and in every image *if these are put in too close a proximity to the real.*

The sequence of the two Ludovico sessions is in its own way critical to this movement. The first session is comprised of "ultra-realistic," "properly cinematic" sequences – a gang of youths, not unlike Alex and his droogs, beating and raping assorted victims – which Alex appraises in the most glowing terms:

> So far, the first film was a very good professional piece of cine, like it was done in Hollywood ... The sounds real horrorshow. You could slooshy the screams and moans very realistic, and you could even get the heavy breathing and panting of the tolchocking malchicks at the same time ... It was beautiful. It's funny how the colors of the real world only seem really real when you viddy them on the screen.

What is at stake in the first session/sequence is an indictment of the relation to simulated violence in the Baudrillardian sense, the same type of violence in which Alex partakes, having learned and ingested so very much from this cinema and his habitation within a mode of existence defined around spectacularity and hyperreality. Moreover, the content of the first session is purely, merely images of violence, the affects evinced by them (if any at all) of the spectacular and sensationalistic: for Alex, at least, they draw forth little more than a pleasantly gratified grin, his relation to them one of pure and pleasing affirmation. By contrast, the second session, which for Alex provides the affective coup de grace, is devoid of simulacral sensationalism. An Eisensteinian montage of World War Two combat and Nazi propaganda footage (per the Parallax Test, the score – a rousing, synthesized rendition of the Fourth Movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – provides both an ironic counterpoint and the final unification of the elements) it presents discrete images less of violence "itself" than of its means, its associated agents and embodiments, its instruments – but never its ends: there are no victims here, only images of power triumphantly on display, and in this their affective charges are reliant on both an historical consciousness of those signifiers and the capacity of that consciousness to recall, in memory or in imagination, the ends those images entailed. Confronted with the terror of the real, with the violence in and of the historical, and moreover with the connection of his beloved "Ludwig Van" with the recent history of fascist power, Alex cries out for the images to cease, desperately negotiating for his release.

What emerges in the second sequence, then, is something of a distinction, if not a clean differentiation, between images of violence and the violences of the cinematic image that supplements what we have observed in the Shower Scene and the Parallax Test. Here, moreso than in the previous paradigms, this is not simply a distinction between the former considered purely on grounds of content and the latter purely on grounds of form: while Silverman's account (for example) of the violence entailed in the intersection between formal mechanics and psychical dynamics certainly speaks to this type of differentiation, it is incomplete and nominal at best. While the arrangement of the images shown to Alex in the Technique's second phase certainly draws stylistic influence from constructivist traditions of collision montage (itself an historical mode of both ideological coercion-through-image and counterviolence to that of the multiple imaginaries extending from commercial cinema to social being), and while these formal interventions indeed constitute a specific and significant kind of and contribution to the repertoire of violences "of" the cinema (particularly the formal violence to codes of continuity, revealing the mutability of all continuities), the movement of the cinematic form-content dialectic, from interdependence to indeterminacy, is significant here: a totality of coordinated and choreographed force-effects, a technique perfected to the last detail but nonetheless fallible, always risking its own undoing. Where it risks this undoing, however, is not (as in the case of the Parallax Test) primarily at the level of the formal relations or juxtapositions it in(tro)duces, but in the images themselves.

The images themselves – in and of themselves, as specific *kinds* of images, carrying with them specified affective charges, the force of which setting them apart from their specific mobilizations against the subject and independent of contextualizing arrangements – tell their own stories, have other effects ... at least potentially. Certainly, apart from process or procedure, to be mobilized to these ends the images themselves must in some way lend and tend to that which puts them *in motion*: function (ideological/political) dictating form (of image), and form (of text) prescribing function (of images it mobilizes and puts into play). But more than this, much more, the images of the second session are singularly violent images; even torn from their historiographical conditions they are steeped in their iconic historicity – the rise of the totalitarian state, the great lie that organized its creation, the mass mobilization of its means of violence from soldiers to tanks to bombers, its spectacular banality and terrifying legacy – and manifest their force accordingly. The editorial discontinuities and recombinations do not contribute to this disruptive violence: they are of a piece with the type of disconnected and quasi-monadic relations Alex is already a part of as consumer and subject of spectacular society. Rather, it is in *continuity* that Alex can be made to be repelled by violence: he must, perhaps appropriately enough, be made to glean an understanding of totality if he is to function properly within it. In the movement from the first to the second session, the Technique inverts the constitution of the subject unable to disconnect the spectacle from reality, but consequently taking that reality as spectacle: for Alex, everything becomes connected, everything registered and felt as ineffably but undeniably, immediately *real*. And they *become* real precisely to the degree that the valences of objectivizing pleasure are turned back against themselves, and his felt and lived connection to the cinematized world-image is concentrated.

And this most remarkable quality most remarkably translates from screen to spectator in a *final* Ludovico sequence, closing the film and constituting Kubrick's *coup de force*: as Alex, recuperating from his suicide attempt and cured of the cure that did so much violence to his own mode of existence, sits with a giddy grin between ceiling-high speakers blaring Beethoven's Ninth, the images of his resurrected imagination triumphally spill out on the screen. If the movement between the first sequence (Hollywood violence, Alex the consumer) and the second (the image of power and the violence of history, Alex the conscious and terrified object of both the image and of history) introduces something of a didactic juxtaposition between the pleasure of the simulated and the terror of the real, the final sequence positions the spectator between these two modes, staging the spectator as the field of impossible reconciliation between these divergent forces, the presentation of his imagination of violent exploits to come – commingling the real and the hyperreal – recalling images from the film and the Technique sequences within it while introducing new images which set the spectatorial memory of those previously presented in new affective relief. The spectator is less forced to make an impossible decision about "which way (and with what depth) to feel" than placed at the nexus of *the impossibility of the decision itself*: one is either a cog in the bourgeois clockwork or an amoral reprobate, and a fascist either way. In short, these are images we cannot respond to, and for the first time in the film, we can perhaps best understand Alex's plight: the images presented to us as though for pleasure are already equated (and expressly understood) as instruments of torture, they carry both a quasi-subversive approbation and an insistent admonition, and we sit, not watching Alex in his chair but *as* Alex in his chair; the film thus ends, the next session to be undertaken at an undetermined time...whenever the next ticket is purchased.

INTERSTICE:
THE DISTINCTION, SUPPLEMENTED
("A VERY SPECIAL VIOLENCE": THE SPECTACULAR, THE SENSATIONAL, THE *PUNCTUM*)

> *When social significance is attributed only to what is immediate, and to what will be immediate immediately afterwards, always replacing another, identical, immediacy, it can be seen that the uses of the media guarantee a kind of eternity of noisy insignificance.*[55]
>
> Guy Debord
> *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*

> *Bacon distinguishes between two violences, that of the spectacle and that of sensation, and declares that the first must be renounced to reach the second, it is a kind of declaration of faith in life. (...) When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it.*[56]
>
> Gilles Deleuze
> *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*

From the four preceding paradigms, we might draw three general conclusions: first, that the representation of whatever act of violence is at best peripheral to the violence that image may inflict; second, that a primary condition entailed within the potentiality of this violent effect is the degree to which these images can be made commensurate with modalities of consumer consciousness; and finally, that these conditions are predicated on the affective capacity of both the image *and* the subject that may or may not integrate a given image into its own horizons of expectation and thought, indeed its own horizon of affect, hence problematizing the notion that the instrumental violence of the medium entails a surety of effects, no matter how strong its forces have worked before the fact to assure sufficient conditions for that surety. In all cases, the image's violence inheres in the degree to which it opens in the spectator zones of indeterminacy, vagaries and variabilities in perception precipitating affects that are potentially irreconcilable with normative codifications. But we are still primarily in the terrain of the instrumental violence of images, the ways in which they force the imagination, rationality, or desire into zones of indeterminacy: in other words, this is an unbalanced equation of the violence of the encounter between spectator and image that is dictated and directed by the latter, with absolute dependence upon but little regard for the former. And just as significantly, we are also still primarily defining the violence of images in relation to images of violence, a relation that has been productive enough but also must be disengaged to appreciate the productivity of that distinction and the violence of the affective.

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[55] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 15.
[56] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, 52.

Attending the diffuse distinction between the sensationalistic-spectacular and sensation vis-à-vis the affective potentialities of each is doubly important in discerning the character of a *truly* violent image. At this point, then, we might more fully consider that distinction between the violence of sensation and the violence of the sensationalistic Deleuze forwards in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation.* "The violence of sensation," Deleuze says,

> is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the cliché). The former is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it passes, the domains it traverses: being itself a Figure, it must have nothing of the nature of a represented object. It is the same with Artaud: cruelty is not what one believes it to be, and depends less on what is represented.[57]

By these terms, the *sensationalistic* can be understood to encompass the highly-coded register of shock, which is itself heavily invested in narrative (and attentional-libidinal) economies, codes, and tropes. By contrast, *sensation,* as Tom Conley explains, "is reiterated through the involuntary effects that move independently of figuration, illustration, or narrative."[58] To be sure, the spectacle and its cinema tend toward the transubstantiation of the latter into the former, be it formally (the codified techniques of shock or suspense) or narratologically (in figures and didactic allegorizations, certainly, but moreover any maneuver that falls under the justificatory-explanatory tyranny of denotative clarity), re-inscribing and reducing intensive sensation to its contained, instrumentally intensified state. Spectacular violence, and the violence of the spectacular, are of the cliché, the sensationalistic voiding of historical and political content, a process whereby the most affectively-charged images become ambivalently politicized signifiers in a general economy of the same – indeed, as in that fantastic reversal evident in the Parallax Test (if to a lesser degree the Ludovico Technique), even the most potent images of power and violence today are irretrievably banalized, as clichés that evoke likewise cliché affects, if any at all.

But at the same time, as Conley notes, the cliché may also become productive if it is pushed to its limit, reframed in such a way that its palliative promises open up on unexpected affective territories. In this way, even the cliché can become an event (and not in the way that Jameson, for example, would ironically frame it), "a manipulation of things given, of affective investment made through a selection taken from thousands of clichés saturating a prepictorial field," the result being an image "that is both within and beyond the creator's control."[59] Subsequent recodings notwithstanding (and, indeed, they are inevitable as the first axiom of an axiomatic system), what is crucial here is the potentiality for free radicalization – of forms, of affects, and even of the cliché varieties of each – within an otherwise automated and consistent system of engagement and effects, a violation of that systematicity that resists recodification by resisting or pushing the limits of its logic, an interruption or caesura – even if as brief as a hiccup or stutter – of the flows of images and desires.

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[57] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, 34-35.
[58] Conley, "A Politics of Fact and Figure," 133.

Given the identification (indeed, identity) of the spectator with the "flow of images" – the figures and forces of figuration, the overwhelming sights that tendentially short-circuit reflection and the processes of imagination, the perpetual coiling and unraveling of desire – relentlessly unspooling before the eyes in a self-sustaining circulatory economy, *any* image that arrests, suspends, or ruptures that flow can be considered of "a very special violence" (to paraphrase Deleuze's appraisal of Bacon), and especially in a time and in a cinema where the most politically overdetermined, situationally dehistoricized, spectacularly impossible and sensationally overwhelming visions are *de rigueur*. What is at stake here, then, is equally recognizing that gap between the image's intended or tendential effects and the affects it precipitates (the latter both evinced by and dilating the former's systemic circulations, circumlocutionary coordinates, and vested investments) as it is of recognizing the disruptive and violent quality of that indeterminacy as a point of unincorporable and unpredictable intensification in the movement of desire, thought, and feeling.

To an extent, this means plunging headlong into radically subjective and even radically personal terrain, examining the ways in which a given cinematic image might function as the general equivalent of what Barthes names in photography as the *punctum*: the encounter with and affective acknowledgement of an unforeseen yet revealing and arresting detail that, by dint of its affective capacities, separates itself from the totality of the pictorial composition. In his discussion of the *punctum*, Barthes is in fact describing a structure of sensation, inasmuch as the emergence and recognition of the *punctum* is predicated on an affective intensity, comprised of an irreducible and singular subjective arrest and response, cast from and casting light upon the blind spots of the classical phenomenological mind.[60] Far from the overcoded intentionality of the contemporary shock-effect – the spectacular startling of the sensorium, an alibi for a kind of violence that Barthes, like Deleuze, relegates to its own, proper space[61] – the *punctum*, while unpredictable and violent, has a quality of sensation that is more supple, more pervasive, and certainly more uncodifiable than any shock whatever: it is a shiver, a shudder, *frisson*, and in this depth, persistence, and atavistic ineffability is a *truly violent sensation*, neither codified nor codifiable by the body that feels it or the image that gave it rise.

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[59] Conley, "A Politics of Fact and Figure," 142.

The sensation correlates, but also not in an instrumental way, with the *punctum*'s formal quality: at once extraneous and immanent to the image, an aberrance that is neither an accident or mistake of technique nor an intentional inclusion, it is a specific but unspecifiable locus of unraveling and haunting fixation. Breaking free from and traversing the tendentially unifying conditions of the *studium*'s codings, uncodable within the means of the text at hand and of the parameters of a given body of Text, these incongruous elements, to paraphrase Barthes' simultaneously formal and subjective appraisal of the *punctum*'s emergence, cannot *but* arrest the gaze: its incommensurability with codification in general, its singular aberrancy within the otherwise organized logic of the *studium*'s textual field and its ideal-intended encounter, both marks and "triggers" it as such. "The *studium* is ultimately always coded," Barthes states succinctly, "the *punctum* is not."[62] And, as Barthes concludes, "whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*."[63]

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[60] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 20-21. Inasmuch as "(c)lassical phenomenology, the kind I had known in my adolescence (and there has not been any other since), had never, so far as I could remember, spoken of desire or mourning," chief among these blindspots, Barthes explains, is "a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria," (21) and this view not only in the observer, but in the object itself. There is a Bergsonism here similar to that in Deleuze: that perception resides in the object that interaffectively determines how it is framed and perceived.

[61] In this, Barthes opens the field even of the camera operator and the photographed subject, who themselves may be startled and set beside themselves in the images they produce. As he says, "I imagine ... that the essential gesture of the *Operator* is to surprise something or someone (through the little hole in the camera), and that this gesture is therefore perfect when it is performed unbeknownst to the subject being photographed. From this gesture derive all photographs whose principle (or better, whose alibi) is 'shock'; for the photographic 'shock' (quite different from the *punctum*) consists less in traumatizing than in revealing what was so well hidden that the actor himself was unaware or unconscious of it." (*Camera Lucida*, 32)

[62] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.

[63] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 55.

But already *where*? Image? Observer? Operator? Or across and between, in the fields that organize them all, traversing production, presentation, and reception? In this unplaceability and interaffectivity, the *punctum* finds its fullest correlation with the Deleuzian concept of sensation: as Bogue explains,

> Deleuze initially describes sensation as having a subjective and an objective side, but he soon adds that really "it has no sides at all; it is both things, indissolubly; it is being-in-the-world as the phenomenologists say: at the same time I *become* in sensation and something *arrives* through sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And finally it is the same body that gives and receives sensation, that is at the same time object and subject."[64]

Not merely a subjective addition by way of a subject-specific affective response, the *punctum* is immanent to the image – and to the parameters of image in general – and actualized upon its encounter. Not merely a matter of intentional inclusion but of effect – the affective effect of the encounter, always immanent to it, always historical, bearing the baggage of its moment – the *punctum* confronts thought and reason as a nefarious "aside," a screaming reminder of the comprehensive rigidity of forms, of the cohesion of the frame itself, breaking it into its out-of-field, its unthought categories and limits. The *punctum*, then, is a dual rupture, a kind of intensive extension, a doubled and rapturous violence: both the intrusion of the immediate-subjective into the historical-objective and the reverse, throwing both simultaneously into indistinction and dissonant relief – in other words, in the sense that Deleuze gives us as "a perception of point of view"[65] which shakes the very foundation of the subject-as-thought-to-itself, *an event.*

Certainly – and Barthes knows this well – the cinema resists the *punctum*, its very emergence as such. Its relentless ideality and unity of forms, its even more relentless rush of images precluding sustained reflection from within its encounter, its very life in movement within the "refuge" of the screen (itself a site of powerful arrest, but for the opposite reason of the photographic frame: it teems with life): all strikes against the potentiality of the medium to provide such a frisson or other unleashing of affect that goes beyond the category of spectacular shock. To the degree that the "shocks" they present are essentially tamed and instrumentalized as means to other ends, they are more firmly moored in the terrain of the sensationalistic, emerging and retreating, pinpricks at best leaving only an aleatory trace, and no scar at all.

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[64] Bogue, "Gilles Deleuze: The Aesthetics of Force," 260.
[65] Conley, "A Politics of Fact and Figure," 137.

The punctum's structure of sensation is spatial and temporal, constituting localized foci which establish a dilatory experience of time that, like the inchoate and monadic character of the encounter, is to an extent extrinsic to the text as such. Duration and differentiation are important here, but even moreso the duration of a differential or differentiating *effect*: in other words, the encounter that constitutes the *punctum* is one that concretizes a singular temporalization of sensation, a *subjective arrest*, a freezing and coalescence of the movement of both knowledge and desire in the face of an image that pushes their parameters to their limits, confronting them with those limits as their immanent unthought, and enduring, haunting, even taunting. To be sure, the cinematic *punctum*, like its photographic counterpart, absolutely requires a sufficient screen and frame of engagement for its registration, recognition, and ultimately violently arresting effect that, also to be sure, the medium does not easily endow.

But Barthes goes too far in excluding from the field of cinematic representation and engagement the very possibility of the emergence of a *punctum*. Perhaps the conditions for its emergence had not yet been allowed, the cinema to which he refers (one terribly ill-defined) not yet happening upon the decisive point at which its own representational field turns, inverts, perceives and reflects upon itself in such a way that would permit or invite the requisite spectatorial reflexivity. But more fundamentally, beyond the requisite of reflection (as a temporal and volitional factor), the quality of indetermination between subject and object which marks the event of the *punctum* neatly coincides with both cinema and sensation; his dismissal is thus cursory, the formal-textual resistance taken as prohibitive and prophylactic fact, a categorical impossibility. Yet the cinematic *punctum* can indeed be understood as possible, and by way of far more than analogy: if not as the arresting detail within the frame held for sustained and intensive contemplation, then as images that represent the limits or the breakdown of the formal tendencies and tendentialities of the medium itself, images that, by their very aberrant presence and ephemeral emergence, open up to thought the cinematic out of field, compelling images beyond that field's possible inclusions – the discomfiture of movement in arrest, the dissolution or overintensification of its forms, the revelation and negation of its vitalizing and sustaining forces, even the rupture of the frame – that carry with them supple but chilling sensations that equally resist codification or determination. We will explore paradigmatic indices of such events now.

PARADIGM III.A: "BULLET TIME"
(SUSPENSION, SENSATION, & SAVORING THE ACT/ION: SPECTACULAR VIOLENCE IN/OF STILLED TIME)

> *Technologies such as cinema and television are machines that take the assembly line out of the space of the factory and put it into the home and the theater and the brain itself, mining the body of the productive value of its time, occupying it on location. The cinema as deterritorialized factory, human attention as deterritorialized labor. Global organization as cinema – the potential cutting and splicing of all aspects of the world to meet the exigencies of flexible accumulation and to develop new affects. Consciousness itself as cinema screen as the necessary excrescence of social organization. Cinema as a paradigm of corporeal calibration. Such is the logic of our present universe, and such are the conditions in which struggle shall be waged.*[66]
>
> Jonathan L. Beller
> "Capital/Cinema"

> *Consumable pseudo-cyclical time is the time of the spectacle: in the narrow sense, as the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and, in the broadest sense, as the image of the consumption of time.*[67]
>
> Guy Debord
> *The Society of the Spectacle*

> *Whoa!*
>
> "Neo" (Keanu Reeves)
> *The Matrix*

In the Wachowski Brothers' 1999 blockbuster *The Matrix*, time, motion, and the presentation of violence take on new modulations in a spectacular technique aptly named "bullet time."[68] Used throughout the film, the first and penultimate bullet time images are arguably the most spectacular, and certainly the most instructive in terms of elaborating the distinction between the sensational and sensation vis-à-vis the concept of the cinematic *punctum*. In the first, a woman (Carrie Anne Moss), clad in black leather, spins to face the police officer arresting her for an undisclosed crime. She leaps into the air and, from the moment her feet leave the ground, time slows swiftly as she continues to rise. By the time she reaches her highest point, and as one leg lifts to kick, her movement has been slowed to near the point of absolute stillness. All the while, the camera has traced a fluid 180-degree arc, at a slight downward angle, around her and the policeman at a constant speed while slightly zooming in to a medium shot, with her foot raised and poised to strike near center frame. This virtual stasis is broken with a reverse jump-cut to an extreme close-up of a lightning-fast kick to the policeman's jaw, and the chase begins. Similarly, in its penultimate use, the camera follows the path of dozens of bullets, and comes to circle the film's protagonist Neo (Keanu Reeves) in a rising and descending 360-degree pass as he balletically weaves and flexes his body to avoid the projectiles. And as in the sequence just discussed, the shot ends at a point of impact with an extreme close-up of one bullet grazing his body: "back to reality," back to real time and, as before and always, back to the action.

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[66] Beller, "Capital/Cinema," 92.

[67] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 112.

[68] "Bullet Time" is, as of this writing, now a registered trademark of Warner Brothers, which distributed *The Matrix* and its two sequels.

On the broadest technological and conceptual level, this technique both constitutes and represents a fulsome cumulation and culmination, indeed something an end(point) of history, for the cinema itself: the medium's entire technological and ontological history, from Muybridge's motion studies to computer animation, collapsed and aggregated into a single and singular technique specific to the ends of not only the production of truly spectacular and sensational images, but ultimate re/presentational mastery. The technological side of things (exhaustively, fetishistically documented to the last detail in the DVD edition's "value-added supplements") is relatively simple to describe: two motion and 120 computer-controlled still cameras, placed in spiral orbits of varying declension around the filmed subject, record an action from a multiplicity of perspectives that are melded into a fluid perceptive rotation by computer interpellation of intermediary frames. The result of this bravura technological production, however, evades facile description: the slowing down – even arresting – of time, interlaced with a continuously shifting perspective, in images that simply must be seen to be believed. In this, these images both constitute and proudly display a kind of conceptual mastery of time and space that exceeds its now-cliché predecessors of slow-motion and freeze-frame which, in their intensive interiorizations, slow or arrest time and motion more or less uniformly within the entirety of the frame's interior and that, amidst the rush of information, have traditionally allowed punctuational junctures to emphasize, episodize, and savor moments and movements through space at the expense and even complete subordination of "real time." In these "bullet time" images, we see a differential modulation of separate temporalities, sheets of time and lines of motion coexisting and intersecting within a single frame: we circle and observe the paths of bullets tearing through the fabric of space as they move past bodies, we trace the motion and mechanics of the jumping body as it coils its energy into a kick to the face, enraptured and diffused in mesmerizing waves of multiple perception, with time, space, and motion unfolding at varying rates in parallaxed planes of perception. In this diffusion and suspension, it is not even *the* camera that observes and renders legible, but rather a *multiplicity* of cameras united by the virtualized logic of the computer algorithm, artificial brains re-mediating perception to a simulacral consciousness in fluid, circulating space and, albeit momentarily so, an elastic, dilated, even infinitely suspensible "pseudo-cyclical time."

On the one hand, this may indeed be, in Beller's terms, the ultimate "image-commodity," forcibly constructing its dialectical counterpart, the "worker-spectator."[69] In these images, we can witness both the characteristic privileging and denying to vision that marks cinematic suture in general (the virtual and enticing omnipresence and omnipotence of the viewer who can see *virtually* everything, but still only what the virtual cameras allow) and, in its sublime sublimation of materiality and perspectivity into the virtuality of image-consumption, the instrumentalization of that dialectic even beyond the cinematic pleasure principle. Within the frame, dilated and protracted, time slows and perspectives shift so that we may savor *every* moment, *every* micro-movement, and *every* angle of the shot-image: in this enticingly hyperrealistic moment, with the perspective of the viewer – and, by Beller's extension, the act of consumption – both virtualized and omnipresent, virtually nothing is denied to vision or imagination, while at the same time pushing both to their very limits.

This latter dialectic is significant. For on the other hand, the stunning primacy of perspectivity – its calling itself outside itself, constituting itself as object – and the sublimity of the affect which accompanies it also constitutes this image as a true event. In short, these are *arresting images* wherein there is a striking dominance of time and perspectivity over movement, calling and demanding attention to temporality and perspectivity as such: more than a representation of subjective time, they call forth a felt consciousness of the subjective limits of temporal perception, perception as a bodily phenomenon and an investment of labor, and the power of the image-object to determine and distend the parameters of embodied perception. To be sure, these images gives rise to radical new percepts, concepts, and affects: their encounter is one of the act of seeing in awed disbelief of its object. This is not simply a mute and gratified awe in the face of the new and the force of the spectacular, however, *but also a shudder in confronting the very logic of consumption in a direct image of time.* In their excess of spectacularity and spectatoriality, in fully inhabiting and virtualizing the registers of time, motion, and consequently money and desire, these are images that enact a multilayered suspension of not only movement and temporality, but also anticipated effect and demanded gratification: they are intensifications that hold the potential for new affective relations in their active revelation of the medium's operative conditions of possibility.

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[69] Beller, "Capital/Cinema," 93 n.4.

But at the same time and by extension, that perceptual experience of time and motion, to say nothing of the affects to which it gives rise, is in the end made to serve the logic of consumption, which itself is also distended and dilated in these images. The virtual ability to suspend time, labor, and thought itself is *the* dominant force in these images, and this force equally paves the way for a moment and an image of pure and unproblematized spectacular consumption. The affects they induce are ambivalent to the degree that while these images open on a field of indeterminacies in the spectator-image relation, their recoding and reterritorialization are not problematic but easy and inevitable; indeed, these affects are less axiomatically reincorporated than always-already anticipated and permissible. What was, in Deleuzian terms, a *potential* time-image then instrumentally (and even literally) prepares the stage for and gives way to a series of action-images of the most reified and clichéd varieties (the fight, the chase, the narrow escape), and its specific mobilization in this instance marks a point at which the "struggle" Beller has noted in cinema between the forces of capitalism and philosophy is lost: the time-image now in fact operating in forced collusion with the logic of spectacular consumption and exchange, an image-commodity both like any other and, in fully, nakedly actualizing the spectacular coordination of image, capital, and desire, one unlike any other hitherto brought to the screen – a *consumption-image.*

In this, we can see an important conceptual shift, from the shot as "merely" a singularly spectacular or episodic event rendered as an object for consumption to the shot as a monad containing the whole of capitalism, actualizing capitalism's ultimate fantasy of overcoming its fundamental limits in the arresting of time and the shifting of the burden of labor to the consuming worker-spectator. The image-commodity circumscribes and inscribes itself as a perpetual present in a series of perpetual presents that interpellates and inscribes the spectator into the logic of its own commodity form in a continuous chain of monadic unfoldings, an endless concatenation of consumable moments. By way of aggregation, the film's narrative unfolding, *its* telos apart from that of the image itself, drives these successive unfoldings as a series of chain reactions, the spectator swept from one arrested moment to another, carried by the constant desire for the next item to consume, each spectacular effect captured and unfolding in what Richard Dienst calls *automatic time*. "If still time slices off images and designates them as past," Dienst says, "then automatic time opens onto an anticipated future: it is an image waiting for events to happen."[70] This "automatic time" is, for Dienst, a modality of the "electronic image" that he associates with television (for him, a problematically deterritorializing force sine qua non). As he notes, "(i)n the electronic image, the indistinction between object and image dissolves into continuous movement, allowing time to pass in a newly automated consistency."[71] The regimented fluidity of the bullet time shots discussed above provides precisely this effect, both within the movement of the narrative (as kinetic points of recoil and propulsion) and apart from it (as discrete, episodic moments), whereby the image itself becomes both the object *and image* of consumption, "a virtual delirium of the consumption of the very idea of consumption ... [where] it is the very idea of the market that is consumed with the most prodigious gratification; as it were, a bonus or surplus of the commodification process."[72]

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[70] Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time*, 161. This is precisely the problem of contemporary CGI-spectacle cinema in general, where the fabricated event arrives later in production, the reactions to it, both in terms of the actors and the camera, mere anticipatory shadow-play. This is most apparent in George Lucas' *Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), a kind of test-run and demo-reel for virtual sets, characters, and events. The "interaction" (such as it is) between the live actors and the virtual characters and settings is often stilted and always shot through with a bland dispassion (with little or nothing to act against or in, they are voided of any true naturalism of affectation). But more telling is a brief moment in a single shot early in the film: a flying enemy suddenly swoops into frame, firing at the heroes, and its projectiles are frantically deflected back against it, exploding it. Here, *the camera anticipates the event*: as the exploding debris hurtles into lower left foreground, the camera does not track with it but, by a clearly registerable millisecond, in advance of it, moving slightly before it does, stopping slightly in advance of its impact on the forest floor. The camera, then, not only constructs a space in which the event will happen, but establishes it by way of (here, failed) orchestrated micro-movements, the present moment it establishes in full anticipation of future (and theoretically unpredictable) events, nothing left to chance, and consequently, for all its spectacularity, nothing even particularly thrilling to feel.

[71] Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time*, 150. It is useful to note that this specific technique was initially developed for television advertising (in a series of truly spectacular adverts for The Gap) and not least in conceptualizing the dispersive conditions of spectacular society as a "new crisis" with which the cinema must contend. As Dienst notes, "(i)t can be no accident that Deleuze will locate the fundamental moment of crisis in cinema at the point just when television appeared on the scene." (146) That television represents an analogon for a nascent postmodernity and the structure of late capitalism is clear, as is the crisis it presents for cinema itself: (i)ts intricate stasis of instantaneous multiple transmissions, its tendential synchrony, its impure and inaccessible 'present': these are powers that the cinematic image does not possess." (146) Or, perhaps more properly, does not *yet* possess; as cinematic image-production merges here quite literally with and overtly commercial televisual aesthetic, a strategy and symptom of the late-capitalist colonization of the visual, the emergence of such consumption-images marks a point where the already-tenuous demarcation between film-as-art and television-as-advertisement-mechanism *par excellence* dissolves into a totality thoroughly saturated with commodity logic. Television here represents the a-historical, the multiple, the omnipresent as ever-present. When Dienst concludes that "only the exteriority of television allows us to think cinema as a history and film theory as a historical discourse in the first place," (146) we can see the dialectical positioning of the televisual against cinema as that which, from the beginning and especially in the role it plays today, posits itself outside the history, even the temporality, that it works to efface (television's self-posited transcendence, abetted by its keystone position in late capitalism). Cinema, in incorporating the techniques of the exterior force that haunts it, takes on its counterpart's properly spectacular commodity character all the more and unleashes its own most internal and antagonistic conditions, seen here at the level of the shot as a *consumption-image*. This syncretic "synergy" is at the same time an effect and source of the integration and singularization – both politically and aesthetically – of the image media. That this formal unification falls most regularly in the category of "special effects" (effects that truly and spectacularly present themselves as such) is also significant in this regard. When

Moreover, these images reinforce the spectacularized commodity character of violence in contemporary Hollywood cinema: internally teleological, seductive and suspenseful, a promise of the pleasure of and in the enactment and registration of violence. Transcoding the more spectacular representational codes of Anime (namely, the extremity and rupturing of perspectival space heretofore unavailable, outside of the unique syntax and technical capabilities of Japanese animation, to the West's camera-bound "live-action cinema") into the formally and affectively familiar cinematic "rules of suspense"[73] (rules which before the fact welcome such an innovation, inasmuch as they are also intrinsically temporal and perspectival: the holding of a limited perspective through a time-frame protracted by either an image of subjective time or a slow-motion effect), the empirical presentation of violence in the first and penultimate "bullet-time" sequences follow a similar pattern: at the moment before the expected violence – a kick to the face, the impending impact of a hail of bullets – time slows to a virtual standstill within the shot, protracting and dilating its parameters and duration, allowing the spectator to *observe* and *savor* every last impossible movement involved in the process of the act. In an intensified expression of the quality of the scene discussed earlier, this *obsessive and anticipatory space* is in both cases

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the same level of visual finesse (read: seduction) is afforded, and at no small expense, to a summer blockbuster and an advert for the exciting new selection of classic appetizers at any given national bar and grill chain – and when the commercial is as numbingly compelling as the film – it is clear that the worst has hardly *yet* to come. The danger implicit in this consumptive co-optation of a direct image of time qua philosophical concept is imminent: as Tom Conley notes in his translator's foreword to Deleuze's *The Fold*, "(w)hen it commodifies concepts, marketing seeks to co-opt philosophy." ("A Plea for Leibniz," xv)

[72] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 269. Brackets mine.

[73] As Massumi notes in *The Autonomy of Affect*, suspense is an intensive state; or more properly, intensity is "a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. (...) It resonates to the exact degree to which it is in excess of any narrative or functional line." (220) It is important, then, to understand the ambivalence between a disruptive state of suspense (exceeding narrative or functional lines) and one which is essentially non-disruptive. Massumi suggests that "*suspense* could be distinguished from and interlinked with *expectation*, as superlinear and linear dimensions of the same image-event, which is at the same time an expression-event." (220) Suspense here entails the freezing of the movement of desire entire, while expectation is a mere cathexion, a suspension which carries an investment, and looks to a (linearly conceived) future release.

ruptured at the point of impact (heel meets chin, bullet cuts through leg) with a sudden cut to a close-up of the local effect in "real time," the fraction of a second necessary for the eye to register the effect and the observing subject to be repaid his or her "due" on investment.

What is crucial here is that the pleasure promised and made good in that instantaneous moment of payoff is only aleatory and does not – indeed cannot – compare to *the pleasure of the process* in the building-up to the final blow, but not in the end so much a *consciousness of process* that would lead to any kind of rupture in its fetishization or the pleasure of its consumption. The spectacular enrapturement of the special effect *as* special effect, in all its gloriously conspicuous production, takes center stage,[74] with the focus on the impact, the moment of violence "itself" that normatively would be the primary point of attraction and attention lasting only long enough to be momentarily registered before the narrative, at its already-established breakneck pace and episodic-spectacular means of unfolding, resumes as expected, as normal. To be sure, this intensified dialectic of anticipation and payoff indirectly rearticulates something of the true character of violence, not simply as a meaningful effect of purposeful action, nor simply *in* action and effect, but as the instantaneous coincidence *of* action and effect: a lightning strike that isolates the wound, ruptures the established flow, and magnifies a certain consciousness of both corporeal and temporal reality. In this very same movement, however, the reifying and commoditizing terms of the violent imaginary are very much preserved and in effect: the violence "itself" is relegated to the status and space of afterthought, to the briefest of barely-remembered moments, to a space of *inconsequentiality* outside of time and meaningful experience.

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[74] As Jameson notes in *Postmodernism*, particularly in reference to the preponderance of "postmodern dystopian films" (384) which ground their images and narratives in *images of technology*, "advanced" or in the process of "recovery," and, more importantly, themselves constituting such an image (that is, the films themselves as celebratory images of technology), "what such films actually give us to consume are not those flimsy prognoses and dystopian meteorological bulletins but rather high technology itself and its own special effects." (385) In this, Jameson proposes that "(w)e must, therefore, posit a kind of supplementary bonus of pleasure in the surplus of the technological image itself: since here high technology is identifiable not only in terms of content (the ostensible future things filmed and then screened for a jaded public) but in the process itself, the nature of this stock and equipment, the qualities of the material image and the successfulness of the 'special effects,' which, as in the paradoxes of the 'suspension of disbelief,' are judged by way of the negation of the negation to be not unlifelike, and thenceforth evaluated according to the millions of dollars spent in their construction (it is indeed well known that today big box-office successes are mainly obtained by new and remarkable 'special effects,' while each of these new constructs is accompanied by a whole secondary publicity about its mode of manufacture, its engineers, its novelties, and so forth). 'Special effects' are thus here a kind of crude and emblematic caricature of the deeper logic of all contemporary image production, in which it becomes an exceedingly subtle matter to distinguish between our attention to the content and our appreciation of the form. 'Expensive form' – rather than the older 'significant form' – that is surely now the watchword for these peculiar commodities, whose exchange value has in some complex supplementary spiral become a commodity in its own right. (…) The abstraction of this process … suggests parallels with the credit system and the constructions of paper money in current stock-exchange practices. Meanwhile, if one does not want to lapse back into technological determinism, it would be necessary to to examine the structure of the new technology for its capacity to sustain libidinal investment of this kind: a jubilation with the new prosthetic powers which distinguish themselves from the older machinery (combustion engine, electricity, etc.) by their non-anthropomorphic character and thus give rise to forms of idealism utterly different from the classical types." (385-386)

But through these movements and machinations, the empirical violence here is not only not the primary point of attraction (in each of these sequences, and indeed in the film as a whole, the copious violence against bodies is generally *not* explicitly or graphically shown), it is not even the point of the images; and at the same time, neither is it only that of the spectacularity of the special effects involved that afford their affective intensities. The pleasure and rapture of these images, the spectacular(ized) sensations that they evoke, is most fundamentally in *the pleasure of witnessing, experiencing, and ultimately consuming the gestures themselves.* The ends toward which these actions tend are more or less incidental: if not fully relegated to the out-of-field, they are certainly subordinate to the temporal mechanics of motion, *in, of, and for themselves*, that are the true focus in every case, simultaneously reducing and elevating the motion-in-time as simply that (disconnected from its instrumental ends, it shies away from being "action" per se, if only for and in its protracted moment).

The violence of these images, then, is twofold. It resides primarily in their grounding in and operation through the principle of *unequal exchange*, of *investment* transformed into *debt*, of relatively nothing (a few moments of screen time that justify their considerable expense in the display *of* that expense) for something far more substantial (the time, energy, and econo-libidinal investment of the spectator's interest, compounding on the side of debt – the side of the viewing subject – rather than that of capital held/possessed – the side of the film/image). Moreover, these images absolutely enact and rely upon a certain surrender and surrenderability (in other words, in the spectator's capacity to be affected), not simply to the film-text's and images' spectacular inscriptions and interpellations, but to the very gesturality of the gestures presented, the spectacular promise they spuriously fulfill and the impossibility of their translation into lived fact, and quite apart from the ends to which they are in service (the violence they inflict, which in all cases is ultimately peripheral). Their second (and certainly not unrelated) violence is in their simultaneous reification of the conditions of the time-image itself which overwhelms all else (the image that puts us back into contact with the thought of time, motion, causation, even awe) and reification of the gestural, spectral *imagines* signing the death of gesture while holding forth its impossible promise.[75] If we follow Agamben's claim that the base-unit upon which the cinema operates is not the image but rather gesture – not the means but the ends to which the means speak, themselves means without end but put thereto – then in these images we can witness the enervating *parodization of the gestural*: within these images, the body becomes an instrument, and its gestures too become instrumental; both subordinated to the service of external ends, each deflated of their political and affective potentialities. It is thus not simply a matter of consuming the image qua image, *but of the image consuming us*: our time, our ideations, our very affects and desires – and this, perhaps, is both their ultimate and most fundamental violence.

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[75] I am indebted here to Agamben's terminology and formulations, though his account of the image as the locus of a simultaneous reification/obliteration and eidetic, memorializing preservation of gesture is more nuanced; the complete citation from which I draw is found in *Means Without End* (55) and opens Paradigm IV.A below.

PARADIGM III.B: THE SHINING
(IMAGE, INSTRUMENT, ACTUALIZATION: THE VIOLENCE OF THE PLEASURE OF THE THREAT)

(T)he close-up does not *tear away its object from a set of which it form part, of which it would be a part, but on the contrary it* abstracts it from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates*, that is to say it raises it to the state of Entity. The close-up is not an enlargement and, if it implies a change of dimension, this is an absolute change: a mutation of movement which ceases to be translation in order to become expression.*[76]

Gilles Deleuze
Cinema I: The Movement-Image

Be not afraid of any man, no matter what his size;
if danger threatens, call on me and I will equalize.

Inscription on the stock of
19th century Winchester rifles

There is no pleasure in the bang, only in the anticipation of it.

Alfred Hitchcock

While Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) presents a veritable catalogue of horrific, haunting, and arresting images – spectral twin girls with sunken, unblinking eyes; a rotting elderly woman, cackling and nude; cascading rivers of blood flooding hallways; all captured with forensic coolness in distressingly dispassionate immobile frames – perhaps the most startling image emerges in the film's most memorably (if, on the surface of things, conventionally) violent scene, as Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson), wielding a fire-axe, attempts to break through a bathroom door to reach and kill his wife, Wendy (Shelley Duvall), hiding, quivering and clutching a kitchen knife, on the other side. For a moment, in a single brief shot, the camera ceases to simply record the profilmic event in the kind of static compositional tableaux that is otherwise consistent throughout the film: instead, it follows the *instrument*, tracing its motion as it swings back and forth, accentuating and compounding its force. As a whole, the scene (down to its very its very catalogue of techniques) is most clearly indebted to a similar sequence in Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919), where the terror of the impending attack is registered on the face of the woman inside, the violence of the father channeled thought his hatchet that threatens with each blow to finally break through the door. In Griffith's construction, it is the impending and imminent violence that defines the *situation* that is registered as and met with terror: the framing of the action at hand belies this, insofar as the camera records the action in static frames, the instrument moving within the stability of one shot-space, the response to its promise of violence in another, in a stable shot-reverse focused more on situational terror – the terror of the situation, and the violence situated in the figure wielding the weapon – than on the instrument itself as the true locus of that terror.

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[76] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 95-96. Emphases his.

But in this ever-so-slight formal modification, Kubrick's sequence goes further than Griffith's, indeed says more about the character of violence at stake, both before the camera and of the camera in relation to the profilmic event. In Kubrick's iteration, the terror of the threat of impending violence is partially displaced from the general-situational, and even from the individual-figural: with the camera's gaze and perspective moving in tandem with the instrument's path of destruction, this terror is refocused on and fully invested in the instrument itself. Coordinately, even the Wendy's fear is clearly articulated as connected less with her husband's murderous lunacy than with the instrument he wields and the terrible threat of its potential effects: while all these are to some degree inextricably registered and conflated with the agent wielding the instrument (his madness and rage, so clearly registered on his face in close-up, motivate its use to "violent ends"), they, and the agent, are ultimately secondary to it: the instrument bursts through the door first, presaging the appearance of his face; his empty hand and naked arm, moving through the hole the instrument has opened to unlock the door, is no match for the knife she herself wields, and recoils as it slashes into frame and flesh; the axe, not Jack, not his animating rage, is what terrorizes here, and is primary in every regard.

What Kubrick achieves in this remarkable shot is both a representation and replication of the cinema's filial obsession with instruments of violence discussed in Chapter Two. In the camera's attention to the motion and mechanics of the instrument's force, the immanently violent potential of the instrument is actualized *in motion and direction*, the violent potential that the cinema itself endows the object is actualized, to the point that its movement affects and pulls by force the movement of the camera, the very frame. In this shot, then, we can witness a series of doublings that intimately connect the cinematic image with instrumental violence in ways that go beyond even the allegorical commentaries in *The Parallax View* and *A Clockwork Orange*: the force of the camera's movement doubles the force of the instrument's movement, and, in its attempt to keep it in center frame, this obsessive foregrounding of the instrument (literally central to the image presented, absolutely the "star" of the shot) foregrounds the cinema's own violent instrumentality. But just as importantly, in the absolute primacy of the instrument to the composition, movement, and affective intensity of the shot-image, the peculiar force of attraction and frisson that *every* instrument of violence carries with it in its appearance on screen is permitted to become the object of the image itself, autonomous from the sequence's situational pleasures and violences.

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To an extent, in *all* narrative cinema, the focus on *any* given object places it within a sphere of imminent and immanent action, endows it with a certain potentiality and a demand that it be actualized. This is most certainly the case in contemporary Hollywood cinema, with its obsessive denotative economy coupled with its equally obsessive cinematic treatment of instruments of violence, every object in the image (indeed, even every image-object), is framed as a potential instrument of violence, and even when such an object may not be immediately associated with violent intent in any other context: the poker glowing in the fire in Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the chainsaw sitting on a table in a littered apartment in DePalma's *Scarface*, even the photographs of a happy family vacation in *Death Wish* or of an unseen victim's wounds in *The Silence of the Lambs* – images that respectively give rise to or are used to inflict violence – are intrinsically benign objects waiting, and moreover expected, to be used to violent ends. Shots of recognized instruments of violence, even unwielded, are thus especially disconcerting and intensified in the investments they demand. The display of handguns laid out on a motel bed in *Taxi Driver* is a chilling vision indeed: the weaponry, arranged as in a store window for the criminal class and individually displayed with the same care as any fine commodity, puts forth an explicit promise, a bill of sale, so to speak, for their later use. Here, each weapon displayed and discussed (and particularly the .44 Magnum, already possessed of an iconic notoriety from the *Dirty Harry* franchise) calls to mind Scorsese's character's earlier monologue describing the horrific damage various firearms can inflict on the body, but this supplementation is ultimately unnecessary: the anticipation and dread of what they *might* do, what in the dramaturgical economy they *must* and *will* do, is in the gleam of every barrel, forged into its steel as it is forged into the image.

In any case, whenever such an instrument appears on screen, it is registered so intensely and intensively for what it promises that it is as though time freezes for a moment as one instrument of violence admires another, the camera projecting and imposing its self-image through its obsessive gaze. This arrest or suspension, of course, has little to do with the actual duration of screen time (though certainly the camera does hold its gaze inordinately on such objects, fetishizing them by dint of its own expensive attention), and even less with the simulacra of experiential time that modulations of screen time can afford (e.g., the melodramatically protracted responses of victims against whom the instrument may soon be wielded). Rather, this is a moment marked by and constituted in its affective intensity, suspended in and by its intensive force, registered and relayed across medium and observer.

This intensive force is in large part constituted in the camera's attention to the instrument, which itself endows it with a certain potentiality, and moreover a certain *quality*.[77] As Bogue notes of Deleuze's consideration of the close-up and the affection-image, such qualities are not proprietarily human; rather, they are both inherent in and evoked by anything which the camera, and especially by way of the close-up, takes as its overpowering point of attention. As he explains,

> (t)he close-up extracts from the face a pure quality, but Deleuze argues that the close-up may extract such a quality from any object, making visible, say, the "glistening" of a leaf, the "sharpness" of a knife, the "luminescence" of a glass of milk. The close-up *is* the face in that the close-up *facializes*, or converts a concrete entity into a decontextualized immobile surface with motor tendencies that expresses an affective quality/power. Affect, thus, is not strictly human. In Pabst's *Pandora's Box*, the close-ups of Jack the Ripper and Lulu extract from their faces various shifting qualities and powers, but the close-ups of the knife also extract qualities that communicate through virtual conjunctions with the qualities expressed by those face surfaces, the interacting qualities pertaining no longer to specific

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[77] Mapping Deleuze's conceptual terminology of the affection-image onto Bergson's "proto-linguistic" categories from *Creative Evolution* (1913), Bogue identifies quality and affectation with the adjectival, each primary (and to a certain extent primal) to the unfolding and apprehension of the *durée*. In *Creative Evolution*, Bogue explains, "Bergson shows how the basic categories of language – adjective, verb, and noun – arise naturally as we negotiate the cosmic flows of the vibrational whole [the *durée*]. Initially, we sense mere transient *qualities*, to each of which we gradually attribute a common identity – hence adjectives. Then we use the emergent continuities in sensible qualities to delineate discrete *bodies* – whence nouns – and finally extract from those bodies a separate, repeatable *action* – thus verbs. To these proto-linguistic categories Deleuze draws parallels among the three movement-images, perception-images corresponding to nouns (in that the selective framing of the perception-image delineates objects), action-images to verbs, and affection-images to adjectives." (Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema*, 36; brackets mine.) And, as briefly noted in Chapter One, the adjectival is that which Barthes assesses as always also "on the side of the image, of death."

> human beings or objects but existing in themselves, impersonal yet determinate, each a singular "indivisible quality, which will only divide by changing in nature (the 'dividual')"[78]

Likewise, for Deleuze the movement of the camera (dolly, track, pan, etc.) functions "to extract from vehicles or moving entities the movement that is their common substance, or to extract from movements the mobility that is their essence,"[79] a formulation that certainly reflects the nomenclature and technique of "bullet time," and even more directly informs the power of Kubrick's image: the latter is the expression of a collusion of forces between camera and object, a symbiosis in which their respective potentialities are actualized, the image activating and expressing the force of the object as the object endows the image with its force.

Yet at the same time, and not least given the principles of affective overdetermination that sustain the medium's politicization of violence, this quality cannot be completely understood outside of or apart from the figures and faces surrounding the instrument: the wielder, the wielded against, the witnesses, and so forth, through their individual actions and expressions, create a kind of affective montage motivated by and appropriate to the instrument, from determination or rage to fear or terror. The degree to which the expressive and affective qualities of face/human and object/inhuman are thus linked and free to shift is what is crucial here, as this is what both permits and informs the treasured way in which this cinema regards instruments of violence: primarily as a matter of ontological obsession (an object of *its* affections, in all possible senses), consequently an affection-image (in the properly Deleuzian sense: an image that both places a monologic demand upon the spectator and compels the spectator into a dialogue with that image). But far from distancing our consideration of the force of the instrument-image "in and of itself," the inseparability of and indistinction between the instrument and the bearer in this cinema tells us a great deal about the affective quality of such images: such constellational images, with the instrument as their organizing center of gravity, speak to and reveal, as a distant and repressed trauma is recalled, the profound dispossession of the gestural and of the acting body itself. In the momentary suspension-intension and frisson arising from such a formation – an image *of* formation – the subject simultaneously recognizes both its status and its constitutive molding, recognizes both its subordinated position vis-à-vis the instrument of its enunciation (the gun, the cinematic apparatus) and the thrill of its enunciation as such. In other words, the violence of these images is as much in the expression or exploitation of the affective charges associated with the instrument "as such" as in how they call to mind and body the degree to which the power to act is unthinkable (if not impossible), how they so nakedly confront the subject with its own dispossessions and the means thereof, how, in the act of continually reconstituting the subject, they compel and even force the subject to *recognize* its power to affect in relation to – and, more importantly, as and only as a product *of* – its being or having-been affected. The countless images which frame the instrument as a means of empowerment that fundamentally disempowers its bearer once that instrument is put down, relinquished, disavowed, or tossed away perpetually reinforce, recall, and rely upon the decisive and (in)formative point of indiscernibility between subject-agent and object-instrument, their material and conceptual interdependence (literalized with characteristic intelligence and grotesquery in Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), where body becomes media-player, and the flesh and bone of the hand merges with the steel and mechanics of the pistol, and even more directly in the repeated mantra in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987): "without me, my rifle is useless; without my rifle, *I am useless.*").

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[78] Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema*, 79.

[79] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 23. As Bogue explains, "(t)hough diverse methods may be used to rationalize and normalize camera movements within commonsense spatio-temporal schemas, the mobile camera tends to extract a pure movement from bodies [or objects], one that takes on an existence independent of any specific character or point of view." (*Deleuze on Cinema*, 46; brackets mine) This is certainly the case in the shot in question, though to a certain extent a "specific point of view" is present: on the one hand constituted by the camera in its obsessive identity with the instrument in recording and retracing its movement and force, and on the other hand in presupposing (even before formally reinforcing) the attentive perspective of the spectator, whose eyes would presumably remain fixated on and move with the instrument regardless of the camera's like movement.

The coordination, conflation, and (under the camera's simultaneously clinical and evocative gaze) qualitative indistinction of the subject-agent and the object-instrument quite directly recalls Foucault's notion of *body-object articulation*, a disciplinary, "instrumental coding of the body"[80] predicated on "the correlation of the body and the gesture"[81] which is coordinate (if not identical) with that "corporeal calibration" and instrumentalization of gesturality evident in bullet time: the wholesale foreclosure of gesture and the acting body as such in their identity with instrumental means. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault illustrates this "meticulous meshing" of the body/bodily and instrument/instrumental with passages from the "*Ordonnance du Ier janvier 1766, pour régler l'exercise de l'infanterie*," which proscribes the proper (i.e., most efficient) use of rifles: "raise the rifle with the right hand, bringing it close to the body so as to hold it perpendicular with the right knee, the end of the barrel at eye level, grasping it by striking it with the right hand, the arm held close to the body at waist height,"[82] and so forth. The process of this coding involves a dual movement: a codificatory stratification of elements – the body and its component functioning parts (the chest, the knee, the shoulder, the arm, the hand, the finger, the thumb, the eye), alongside those of the instrument (the butt, the trigger-guard, the trigger, the barrel) – and a recodificatory recoordination of those strata (the trigger-finger, the eye-barrel). In the first movement, there is "a breakdown of the total gesture into two parallel series: that of parts of the body to be used ... and that of the parts of the object to be manipulated (...)."[83] The second movement, however, is decisively all-inclusive, and productive of a specific image of power: inasmuch as it "fixes the canonical succession in which each of these correlations occupies a particular space," the consequent product is one in which "(o)ver the whole surface of contact between the body and the object it handles, power is introduced, fastening them to one another."[84] Independent of one another, each of these two conglomerative strata (the body and the instrument, each with their own mechanics of coordinating and completing certain actions through the actions and interactions of their component parts) have different functions of power, both displaying power in their own, discrete, and intelligible ways; in their fusion, however, both function-sets become indiscernible, and ultimately the former becomes inextricable from, and more importantly subordinate to, the latter.

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[80] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 153.
[81] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 152.

This binding of body and object, this correlation and coordination of functions from the microscopic to the macroscopic, thus transforms the body, by an alchemy of attribution, into a new object: "It constitutes a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex."[85] And it is in this that the body as such, the subject-agent as such, becomes subordinate in the equation, given purpose by its all-too-literal instrumentalization, its full objectivization, its condition of dispersal, disappearance, and denouncement: here, Foucault says,

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[82] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 153.
[83] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 153.
[84] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 153.
[85] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 153.

> (o)ne is as far as possible from those forms of subjection that demanded of the body only signs or products, forms of expression or the result of labour. The regulation imposed by power is at the same time the law of construction of the operation. Thus disciplinary power appears to have the function not so much of deduction as of synthesis, not so much of exploitation of the product as of coercive link with the apparatus of production.[86]

Consequently, disciplinary power has created an acting body – or more precisely, an *image of an acting body* – that is confined to and defined in its potentiality by the tool to which it has been fastened and fused: the body that first displayed power over the object is now in submission *to* the object and *by* the object (becoming, in a sense, the instrument *of* the instrument, as a carrier to a virus, an organism to its genetic code).

In this conflation, then, the body is directly and inextricably linked to the productive capacities of the instrument (the image of the instrument as the image and endower of power, the body-object as an image both productive and produced), their respective potentialities becoming one: the body cannot be conceived or conceive itself as capable of action, and consequently cannot act, outside of what either the instrument or mode of discipline presupposes. The body-object must and may only act within its function: if it does not, the force of instrumental(izing) disciplinary power loses its capacity to affect, and the body, no longer being-affected, loses all material productivity, all sustainability of the image of the individual as such; the objective and factual understanding of the subject and its capacity to act is only seen and articulable through these instruments, and without these instruments, this understanding consequently ceases to operate, indeed to exist at all. The subject and its capacity to act, its very capacity to occupy a space within causal networks, only functions through the use – or again more precisely, the *image of the use* – of these instruments as bearers and bestowers of meaning.

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It is thus that every instrument of violence the cinema presents holds a promise and demands interest, holds a threat and demands respect, even fear and dread (and this even though we know that the instrument cannot be used "directly" against us), but never, ever loathing. Under the camera's gaze, the instruments become *icons*, in the literal sense (as analogical representations of an inchoate referent), in the general-mythic sense (as sacred totems), in the cinematic-industrial sense (as stars, each with a recognizable and distinguishing power) and finally also in the Deleuzian sense (as the potent combination of the expressed affect and that which expresses it actualized by the camera's intense attention and affection). And it is from this iconicity, which for Deleuze characterizes the affection-image, that the affects of power they evoke and enact are active, legible, and even (as Butler as noted of the contradictory and masochistic passion for submission) ambivalently admired.

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[86] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 153.

If nothing else, these are the problematics that a film like *Dirty Harry*, which is at least as much about weapons as the people behind them, most innately attends. Like the educational and scientific newsreels documenting and representing the power of the atom bomb, and of a part in the trajectory that culminates in current military visual technologies and "first-person shooter" gaming, this emblematically American film is both symptomatic of the thought of the possibilities of power afforded the unaugmented individual in late capitalism's relentless culture of deficiency and, in caulking the very essence of agency onto images and/of/as instruments, actively contributive to the promulgation of such constellations of thought and action. As screenwriter John Milius explains in a video interview (while tenderly holding one of the prop guns, gazing at it with an unsettlingly fetishistic, even porno-erotic admiration that matches the interviewer's camera that keeps it, more than the subject of the interview, front and center in the frame), "It's a very valuable gun now – *it's become an icon*."[87]

Milius' ingenuous statement all the more reveals that *Dirty Harry* is no more about the lurid police procedural plot it advances, or even the narrative's literal and symbolic statements regarding the impotence of law, justice, and bourgeois masculinity alike, than it is about *the gun itself as the most direct means to these ends*: the gun as totemic icon, the instrument alone as the keystone in a powerful and profitable economy of symbolic value, simulacral agency, and violent action.[88] It is clearly not incidental, then, that the film's now oft-copied print advertising consisted of the iconic shot from the film's iconic opening episode: gun foregrounded, audience and criminal alike secretly desiring to see its potential actualized ("feeling lucky?"); the film's 1973 sequel makes the point even clearer in its title: *Magnum Force*. The gun, the threat and promise of its spectacular capacity for destruction teased and hinted at throughout the film, is the star here, always in the foreground when drawn and displayed. And it is in this that this film, so often critiqued for the fascism of its plot elements and the espoused politics of its titular character, is at its most fascistic: in the powerful, violent threat embedded within, and embodied as, the very image *of* the gun, demanding respect not so much for what it may do, but for everything else it represents. In sum, this is Arendt's critique of Cold-War politics *in esse* and *in extremis*: the threat of force that becomes force itself, that furthermore becomes violence in perpetual reserve and contingent deferral, a violence enacted through and in an image of that threat, and that by extension becomes the dangerously ambivalent bridge – suffused with dread, anxious anticipation, and a certain chilling pleasure – between the threat the image represents and the decisive power it promises to afford.

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[87] From a video interview titled "John Milius: Getting the .44 Magnum" on Warner Bros' "Clint Eastwood Collection" *Dirty Harry* DVD (2001).

[88] This value is often not purely implied. In both John Woo's *Face/Off* (1997) and Brian DePalma's *Snake Eyes* (1998), for example, a primary character wields a gleaming gold .45-caliber pistol, and in each case that weapon is accorded an even more intensive screen time to highlight its unique value. And the importance of the gun to a given scene also affects the production entire: not simply framing and editing, but also direction and performance, its privileging and presentation determining all other elements. As cinematographer Ernest Dickerson comments on a scene where "West Indian Archie" (Delroy Lindo) delivers a pistol to a young Malcolm Little (Denzel Washington) in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992), "So much of the time, you know, you're gunning for the gun rather than for the performance. Because you want that *light* to hit that gun at a certain moment in a certain way, and God, it's so hard for an actor to raise a gun and hold it in a moment and in a way

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that the light's gonna reflect off of it. I mean, how do you know? But you do take after take after take and the one that you use for that moment is the one that's the best for the gun." (From the audio commentary of Warner Bros' 2005 DVD edition; emphasis mine to approximate Dickerson's)

INTERSTICE:
THE DISTINCTION, REINFLECTED

> *(T)he film produced by an artist working in capitalist industry (and all known industry is now capitalist) springs from the effort to eliminate aberrant movements, useless expenditures, differences of pure consumption. This film is composed like a unified and propagating body, a fecund and assembled whole transmitting instead of losing what it carries.*[89]
>
> Jean-François Lyotard
> "Acinema"

At this point, we may have gone too far – or perhaps not far enough – along the lines of thought permitted by what we've been calling the "cinematic *punctum*." This discussion of such cinematic moments of reflexive, intensive arrest and sensation fails the letter of Barthes' concept to the extent that, for the most part, these images just discussed rely on *what* they present *for* their effect to be actualized: their spectacularity is the lever by which they evoke a given response, and in this regard their affects are as much instrumental as incidental, in effect to the greater extent the recoded and reified image *of* the *punctum*, *of* the event. But at the same time, the spirit of Barthes' concept holds true, insofar as these images resonate with(in) the viewer ways that exceed their base spectacularity, even as they use this as their alpha and omega: these images are *both* purely spectacular (i.e., empty and reified) *and by this very dubious virtue* capable of confronting the spectator with the conditions of its own constitution, the decisive and limiting parameters of its mode of existence.

Nonetheless, while the previous two paradigms certainly entail certain ruptures (and even an opening to consciousness) of cinematic-experiential time, and while these ruptures are certainly coordinate with and invested in the affective responses that arise from or define their encounter, the violence of sensation these images afford is also, certainly, qualitatively limited. This limitation is in large part because their objects are ineffably, indeed properly, *cinematic*: as we have noted often enough, gestures, instruments, and most certainly violence fall precisely, and indeed *too comfortably*, within the domain of the medium's (to say nothing of its observant spectator's) most cherished objects. To no small degree, this is precisely what informs their affinity with the politics of cinematic desire and consumption, permits their inclusion, and thereby denegates the potentially violent or disruptive affects they might unleash.

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[89] Lyotard, "Acinema," 352.

Moreover, for all they might problematize and reveal, the affects to which these images *do* give rise are not only cooptable back into those of consumption and coded desire, but arise from them, the return a mere *refrain*. Recalling Deleuze's general distinction between the violence of the sensational/istic and the violence of sensation, we might say that while these images impact the register of sensation in their own right – they *do* evoke, and even conjure, specific affects of power and the surrender thereto – the images discussed above more fully belong to the category of the sensationalistic: theirs are contained, already-coded affects, affects "owned and recognized" (to recall Massumi's words) before the fact by the images themselves, harnessed as a vector, conduit, or generalized field for an intended, predetermined, and ultimately ideological effect. In addition to the medium's affinity with these affects' respective "objects," this is also informed and borne out by these images' utter lack of resistance to being reintegrated into the patterns of consumer consciousness that they never actively opposed in the first place: like the contemporary banality of immediacy, the impostured banality of the sensationalistic has taken hold, and can no longer give rise to the kinds of affects we might more rightfully call violent vis-à-vis the intentions and tendencies of the text as a whole – that is, affects that are unpredictable, potentially unpleasurable, and perhaps irreconcilable with those necessary for the "proper experience" of "pure consumption." What we might consider, then, are images that move from the cinematic to the *acinematic*: that is, images that, by the very things they bring to vision and the means by which they do so, act against the ideality of the cinematic encounter – its economy of codified pleasures, its objects of affinity and affection, its very conceptual bases.

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In "Acinema," Lyotard posits a theory of the cinema (and at the same time a perspective on desire under late capitalism) based in a consideration of the extreme polarities of movement – the static and the mobile – between which film, capital, and desire each oscillate. His thesis is for the most part familiar: that what binds desire, capital, and cinema is economic, circulatory movement, that within a mode of existence under capitalism the movement of each must be properly and productively regimented, and that the techniques proper to cinema – cinematography, direction, framing, cutting – establish just such an economy of spectatorial investment, the film organizing vision and desire in motion, and in such a way that corresponds to capital in circulation: all movement a movement of return, a productive movement of progressions and propagations which works against excesses, aberrances, or arrests. The correspondences here are not merely analogical, but functional: given the libidinal investment in cinematic identification (scopophilia), in vision in general (epistemophilia), and in consumption (commodity fetishism), disrupting the normalized flow *at any point* opens the potential for the disruption of the economy entire, opening lines of flight along which new ways and intensities of feeling might emerge. The "acinematic," then, refers as much to a field of uncodified or denaturalizing techniques and an analogical model for the precarious economicity of desire as to what, in Beller's "world organized like cinema," represents the limits of their affectivity.

In this, Lyotard brings together and problematizes both materialist critiques of spectacular society's totalizing ideological force and affective flattening and psychoanalytic critiques of the (re)producibility of desire vis-à-vis the cinematic apparatus and its product(ion)s: his is a theory of dynamism of the Deleuzian sort, his inquiry situating motility and circulation not as effects but as conditions of possibility that always threaten to subtend and slip the bounds of the systems they enable. Like his friend and contemporary Deleuze, Lyotard notes that much more is at stake in the dynamics of cinematic desire than ideology-critique, namely

> just how wretched it is to answer this question in terms of a simple superstructural function of an industry, the cinema, the products of which, films, would lull the public consciousness by means of doses of ideology. If film direction is a directing and ordering of movements it is not so by being propaganda (benefiting the bourgeoisie some would say, and the bureaucracy others would add), but by being a propagation.[90]

In stark contrast to the Baudrillardian notion of the simulacrum as a pure mechanism of false consciousness, a motivated but fundamentally empty product of the processes of representation without referent or meaning, he suggests that

> (a) simulacrum ... should not be conceived primarily as belonging to the category of representation, like the representations which imitate pleasure; rather, it is to be conceived as a kinetic problematic, as the paradoxical product of the disorder of drives, as a composite of decompositions."[91]

What Lyotard isolates here are the alpha and omega of cinema's (and, for that matter, the spectacle's) representational and political capacities vis-à-vis the economy of desire it inhabits and extends; the exploitation and habitation of either polarity creating the conditions for a reversal of the image's function, even a short-circuiting of the cinema's logic, its economy and *ratio* fundamentally imbalanced. As Lyotard explains,

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[90] Lyotard, "Acinema," 352.
[91] Lyotard, "Acinema," 351.

> (i)n letting itself be drawn toward these antipodes the cinema insensibly ceases to be an ordering force; it produces true, that is, vain, simulacrums, blissful intensities, instead of productive/consumable objects."[92]

On the one hand, the *excessively mobile image* – not a matter of what is traditionally considered as cinematographic motion per se, as in a rapid tracking shot, instantaneous editing, or movement of bodies or forms within the frame, but rather of that which exceeds, or seems to exceed, the objective techno-ontological capacities of the apparatus to capture, order, frame, and clearly re/present – tends toward abstraction, a discarding of the invisible and tacit support structures within the image itself that lend both it and that which it contains stability, legibility, and recognizability. An essentially *formal* problematic, this freeing or even elimination of semic support produces a true "image in motion," arising from "any process which undoes the beautiful forms suggested by [cinematographic movement], from any process which to a greater or lesser degree works on or distorts these forms," and which consequently "blocks the synthesis of identification and thwarts the mnemic instances."[93] On the other hand, the apposite polarity of immobilization or stasis carries the potential for equally disastrous and violent effects: threatening the economies of movement and mobile economies organizing the cinematic text, apparatus, and spectatorial encounter by way of excessive intensification, this polarity poses the potential "to endlessly undo the conventional synthesis that normally all cinematographic movements proliferate."[94] In the case of the *static image or image of stasis* (like the mobile image above, an extraliteral conceptualization), Lyotard suggests that "(i)nstead of good, unifying and reasonable forms proposed for identification," in other words, images of "living images" in felicitous concordance with our own, "the image would give rise to the most intense agitation through its fascinating paralysis."[95]

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[92] Lyotard, "Acinema," 351

[93] Lyotard, "Acinema," 358. Brackets mine.

[94] Lyotard, "Acinema," 357.

[95] Lyotard, "Acinema," 357.

Certainly, as we have seen most clearly in "bullet time," the frozen or protracted moment always offers up a space for the mechanics of reification and consumption to take hold, a space that invites the investment of desire and permits its nominal fulfillment: no longer "in motion," and moreover freezing motion itself, Lyotard himself admits that "(t)he tableau vivant in general, if it holds a certain libidinal potential, does so because it brings the theatrical and economic orders into communication..."[96] But at the same time, as a simulacral and proliferating machine, the cinema, like the spectacle, is defined and operates by constant movement (like the shark in *Jaws* qua gross figuration of corporate capitalism, it dies if it stays still, and can only be stopped by exploding it from the inside): the static has no place in its material economy (as the irruption of circulation), and even less in its psychic economy (both as the stuttering or arrest of spectatorial desire and as the time of contemplation, the gift of time to pause, reflect, contemplate, and even interrogate that the spectacle and its cinema cannot afford to give). Between the centrifugal demands and centripetal effects of restless circulation and static consumption, this dialectic of stasis and motility must be carefully, economically maintained: neither that which tends toward the fully static nor toward excessive and uncontainable movement can be abided.

Putting further discussion of this latter polarity to the side for the moment, if we can recognize in each of the previously discussed paradigms historically-significant meditations on the possibilities and potentialities of action, ideation, and desire through the various affective modalities of the movement-image, we might also recognize, as a contraposition, that the static, the immobile, and by these terms *the dead* present a certain conceptual problem for the integrated façades of motility and agency that these more "affirmative" (and more unproblematically consumable) images provide. In other words, merely by their kinetic apposition to those moving images that differentiate and define the medium itself, in the cinema still images and images of stillness alike serve to violate those vital processes of circulation and the very constitution of the Jamesonian "mesmerized sensorium" to which they give shape: such images may be regarded as acinematic and intrinsically violent not simply because they present images "of" death, but because they signal and herald the potential death of the image itself, and all it carries with it.

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[96] Lyotard, "Acinema," 356.

PARADIGM IV.A: FROM HELL
(FROZEN MOMENTS, SUBLIME CORPSES, & THE TERROR OF THE STATIC)

> *Every image, in fact, is animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification and obliteration of a gesture (it is the* imago *as death mask or as symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the* dynamis *intact (as in Muybridge's snapshots or in any sports photograph). The former corresponds to the recollection seized by voluntary memory, while the latter corresponds to the image flashing in the epiphany of involuntary memory. And while the former lives in magical isolation, the latter always refers beyond itself to a whole of which it is a part.*[97]

Giorgio Agamben
"Notes on Gesture"

> *(T)he Photograph's* noeme *deteriorates when this Photograph is animated and becomes cinema: in the Photograph, something* has posed *in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling); but in cinema, something* has passed *in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images: it is a different phenomenology, and therefore a different art which begins here, though derived from the first one. In Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses; and even so: if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive,* as corpse*: it is the living image of a dead thing.*[98]

Roland Barthes
Camera Lucida

Following Lyotard's lead in considering the violence of the acinematic image, we might first turn to the problem of the polarity of stasis, which might be further segmented along two distinct but intertwining lines: the static or immobilized image (e.g., the freeze-frame) and images of stasis (e.g., the image which holds within its bounds an entropic space or figure/figuration of stasis). In either case, there is a fundamental disruption of the circulation and continuity of movement that is the material and conceptual lifeblood of the medium and its capacity to affect the spectator, a disruption in and of the flows of desire that drive and demand that movement. These two image-types, while different in kind and bearing their own "proper violences," may also coincide; to begin, however, we might map out their distinguishing characteristics to better appreciate the force of their rare coincidence.

The violence of the static image is potent and multiple. First, as we have already suggested via Lyotard, it actualizes a force of disruption that is always immanent to but carefully regulated within the medium itself: that of movement, the unifying progression of still frames from static entities to a fluid totality, the momentary condensation and calcification of its flux and flow. Moreover, and recalling Kracauer's and Bazin's theses on the medium's ontological singularity in its movement beyond its technological and philosophical forebear in photography, in the re/turn to static images, we find the decadent violence of a devolution: the medium lapses back to its atavistic origins, it moves (as Barthes notes) from one phenomenology to another (i.e., from a phenomenology of life to a phenomenology of death), and finally, per Kracauer, does violence to both its ontological fulfillments (its freeing of photography from functions it could not fulfill) and its own ontological and ideological functions (its characteristic and requisite motility, and moreover its very place guaranteed by the former fulfillment and advancement into new phenomenological terrain). In holding the moment – already violent in itself, and decisively as framed by the camera – and if only momentarily refusing to let it return to the film-text's circulatory economy, the still image presents a certain catastrophe to that economy and all it bears, demanding intensive investments before, upon, and in the image that it cannot and does not, as a matter of course, readily bear. The film runs on, expending frames (if it does not, the film itself will immolate, calling off all investments and expenditures), but this expenditure is in excess of the ends it materially, psychically, and affectively must needs achieve.

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[97] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 55.
[98] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 78-79. Emphases his.

The violence of the static image – and particularly as it resonates with the problem of the moment and its capture, constituting the borderline of the existential and the ontological in the cinema's aptitude for violence – is perhaps most strongly evidenced in the interplay between the static and the mobile in the *entr'acte* to Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas.* In this opening expository sequence, freeze frames capture violence both in the act, "*dynamis* intact," and hold, unsettlingly, on its effects (bloodied faces and bodies, in the midst of sputtering their last breaths), interrupting the hyperrealized smoothness and intensification borne by the camera's Steadicam flow with protracted and doubly-intensified instants of static recording and recoding, refusing to let the events flow back into the passage of time, freezing them as instants that uncomfortably and intensively halt the sequences' inexorable flow of images. The violence of these images, of course, has less to do with *what* they show (however horrible, however uncomfortable to be forced to witness at length) than in how they disrupt the continuity of action, freeze the movement of image and its consumption-in-motion, and cruelly suspend the logic of the action-image, forcing reflection into that space, inserting the acinematic into the cinematic, irreparably damaging the latter's automated consistency. The violence "in action" that these images freeze is compounded and redoubled: as something of a diptychal image of the vacuum created in the Shower Scene's absent impacts, these arrests centripetally hold the spectator and the flow of images alike into a single moment within the frenzied movement of (the) violence, recoiling the violence *of* the scene in a protracted instant which, in its irruption of the event "in real time," shores up both the antinomic polarity within every image that Agamben describes (the image comprehensible, and all the more terrible for it, by referring to the anterior memory of the temporarily suspended violence in progress; the image itself both interrupting and preserving that visceral terror) and the anticipatory agitation that Lyotard notes (the desire for the violence, however horrible, to be carried out to its concluding coup de grace, to provide the payoff, to return to the economicity of the plot and flow of images "in progress" that the acts of violence and the static interruptions have distended).

These matters become more complicated, their problematics compounded, when the cinematic image "in motion" is occupied or preoccupied with a focus on an embodiment *of* the static, and particularly on that most profound and emblematic image of stasis: the corpse, as the figure of death – if not yet "the death of the image" toward which this might tend – wherein something of a violent irruption can be recognized and registered, and especially when held too long, and too still, before our eyes, the entropy of the corpse enervating all that surrounds it. As static embodiments *of* the static, corpses were an ideal subject for photography (particularly early, long-exposure photography), macabre still(ed) lives frozen in their decay, rendered all the more quiescent and, as Barthes argues throughout *Camera Lucida*, all the more beckoning and evoking photography's affinity and obsession with the dead and the category of death *tout court*. To the cinema, however, they would appear to offer relatively little of value beyond that of mere shock or procedural investigation: as an unwanted and untenable reminder of base materiality and its precarious fragility, as an impediment to the movement of plot and narrative (a problem to be solved, literally and symbolically), and moreover as the sinister *contrapposto* to the movement of the supposedly living, as the "walking dead," through entropic time arrested, the corpse is the *figura non grata* of contemporary cinema, to be expunged or secreted away upon the expenditure of its narratological and sensational use-value. When focused upon, however, with the necrophiliac gaze of which we usually only see the obverse side in the cinema (the side that *causes* death, in its "murder and dissection"), the corpse may again become a supremely violent image: the occasional sustained focus on the corpse is one that, both despite and because of the generalized banality of death Bauman recognizes in late capitalism's voidings and virtualizations, inevitably *demands* both attention and revulsion, curiosity and frisson.

To be sure, like the still image even the corpse can be made amenable to the most accommodatory, affirmative, and even pleasurable, consumable terms. From the more discretely ideological division of labor discussed in the previous chapter to the imposition of formal principles of "balanced/good composition" upon the abject corpse, textual and aesthetic strategies to recompose and even delectably represent these images of the de-composing abound in this cinema.[99] Coupled with his penchant for the spectacular, DePalma's mortician's gaze, for example, cannot but allow for such delightfully composed images, as with Frank Nitti's (Billy Drago) body broken over the roofs of perfectly parked automobiles in *The Untouchables* (1987), and even more than this the body of Tony Montana (Al Pacino), framed within the frame in a chlorinated pool deepening in red in *Scarface*'s final, elegiac tableaux. More than the satisfying "kicker" image to a sequence, more than the proof of death of the villain, these funereally composed *tableaux mordants* are beautiful as still-lives, devoid of horror. Even *Saving Private Ryan*'s Omaha Beach sequence, for all its queasily corporeal engagement and terror in the face of so much impressionistic mutilation, for all its broken bodies graphically displayed in the most floridly anatomically correct detail, ends on a startlingly discreet, and given the aesthetic and fleshly chaos which precedes it, discretely startling, image: a single body, isolated and whole, framed around its periphery by dozens of others, a corpse which in its static presence will motivate actions locally and half a world away, and in its presentation offered up, on display as though on a platter, as a beatified sacrifice (to war, to God, to country, and most importantly to the movement and motivation of the narrative itself). In the end, these are images that merely *happen to include the dead*, their formal unity and compositional clarity overwhelming and marginalizing the object at their center. The corpse's inclusion in the set entails a certain funereal containment, a certain making-compositional of the fundamentally decompositional that relegates and reinscribes both the dead and death itself into the domain of image, divested of its full implications, not least by cutting away to the continuing action.

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[99] Kristeva's reading of the compositional qualities in Holbein's painting *Dead Christ* rightfully equates composition and isolation: not simply that a sense of isolation may be endowed through compositional means, but that composition itself always isolates and objectifies its object (a thesis familiar to film theory and criticism and much of this project). In the image, the corpse is all the more dead – embalmed, entombed, and all-the-more earthbound: "a body stretched out alone, situated above the viewers, and separated from them. (…) Holbein's *Dead Christ* is inaccessible, distant, but without a beyond. It is a way of looking at mankind from afar, even in death … a vision that opens out not on glory but on endurance." (*Black Sun*, 113.)

The problematic nature of the cinematic corpse, and the limitations imposed upon its affective potentials when presented as image, is particularly, poignantly evident in the very first frames of Spike Lee's *Clockers* (1995). An elegy for victims of structural, systemic, and institutionalized violence, the film cannily opens with a fade from the empirical Earth of the Universal Studios logo into a gunshot wound to the head (the hole emerging as a negative afterimage of the planet, as if the world entire were sucked into its vortex), and proceeds through a lengthy montage of (presumably actual) crime scene photographs, the fallen bodies and weeping survivors shown therein all victims of the sovereign force of law, both juridical and economic, and the failure of law to manifest itself in or as justice. As a collection of *evidence*, the sequence suggests that whether as victims of police brutality, poverty, street crime, or any other institutionally-legitimized violence, the end met is ultimately and inevitably the same, and the sequence dispassionately yet compellingly presents this evidence *as fact*: the dead, their stillness redoubled by the factic qualities of the photographeme and their evidentiality which frame them, are awe-ful, chilling, and impossible *not* to behold, the movement of the camera intensifying this macabre pull as it scans across the details of every body within the frames.

But at the same time, the very facticity of these individual photos and the montage that organizes them, the very facticity that constitutes its expressive and affective power also defuses their horror with a cool juridicial and scientific sensibility. If by virtue of its gaze alone the camera always endows the corpse with a certain blank objectivity, to be sure recent cinematic texts have taken this one step further, constituting what we might call an *autopsorial cinema* concerned with the display and examination of the dead as much for plot purposes (say, the police procedural) as for the similarly cool sensibilities of the audience. In such films, the "actual violence" at stake is most often unobserved, with what film historian Laurent Bouzereau calls "postmortem violence"[100] – that is, the violence of presenting the ends of violence, particularly as the corpse – taking center stage. The films Bouzereau isolates as exemplars of this kind of violence – Curtis Hanson's *L.A. Confidential* (1997) and David Fincher's *Se7en* (1996) – indeed do not simply revel in the display of whatever squeamish aftereffects of violence (in the former, bodies bullet-ridden, freshly eviscerated, and with faces eaten away by rats; in the latter, bodies force-fed, stripped of flesh or features, starved, and sexually mutilated) for their spectacular or sensationalistic qualities, but moreover on those displays' character as such: providing forensic evidence that demands further investigation. To a large degree, this is a function of plot: as police procedurals, all the evidence presented (the dead included) is framed as a site of investigatory inquiry; *Se7en* literalizes this more abstract thematic concept by staging an early scene, set apart from the film's dank noir aesthetic all the more by the cold fluorescent glow of blue-white light, within the autopsy room, the camera slowly panning around the corpse, the medical examiner and detectives overseeing and examining the body, culminating with its prominently displayed – and exhaustively, clinically discussed – gleaming-red, bagged and tagged stomach.[101]

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[100] Bouzereau, *Ultraviolent Movies*, 233.

In "The Technology of Homicide," Ken Morrison explains that his titular concept is a "way of designating the actions, moral principles, scientific measures, police practices, means of explanation, and the strategies for arriving at the truth that are set in motion after a murder has been committed" which, in Western societies, "refers to the entire framework employed to determine the 'truth' about what happened."[102] Underlying and motivating these "procedures for the production of truth"[103] are discourses of facticity (the concrete establishment of the crime as such with evidential means), disciplinarity (Foucauldian technologies of the body, including anatomization and pathologization, as well as his technologies of truth, including torture and confession), and acculturated morality (as in the case of tacit prohibitions on filming not only the dead, but the moment of death itself). In his discussion of Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991), Morrison points (though often implicitly) to how these discourses and the technology they construct are both revealed and problematized in the case of the Zapruder film as widely-disseminated public document, as intensively scrutinized forensic evidence, and finally, in its use in Stone's film, as a celebration of the production of truth *as such.* As Morrison observes, it is in *JFK*'s central sequence – where, before the court of law, Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner) displays and scientifically analyzes selected frames from the Zapruder film, a scene which indeed makes the case for and justifies the film entire – that the technology of homicide becomes fully scientific, moving from hermeneutic "judgments about body positions, gunshots, wounds, timing, shooters, … reactions," and so forth to rest upon "all the powers of science including physics, forensics, geometry, ballistics, … optical enhancement, audio analysis, and computer reconstruction…"[104]: in other words, those qualities and forces appropriate to and always embraced by the cinema, which, to go beyond Morrison's claims, is the unifying technology of homicide at stake here, and one which renders the fact of homicide (to say nothing of its ends) both *intelligible* in ways that subtend even the disciplinary strength of the varied pathologizing and moralizing forces at stake, and, as in the case of *JFK*'s headshot loops, even *palatable* through endless mechanical repetition, as *simply another image among many*, relatively undifferentiated outside of its specific (and likewise dispassionate) autopsorial use- and truth-value. In short, the forensic and indeed necrophiliac character of this prevailing Western technology of homicide tendentially overwhelms the horror of the corpse itself, whatever the epistemological foundations of this horror might be: captured in image and coded as evidence, the dead body's more chilling and sensorially-disturbing qualities dissipate, it becomes an image for interrogation like any other.

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[101] Indeed, Fincher's cinema as a whole is relentlessly autopsorial, either literally (as in *Alien³* and *Seven*) or visually (as in *Fight Club* and *Panic Room*, where the camera, by a technique called "photogammetry" that is not entirely unlike bullet time, swirls, swoops, and penetrates through walls, around objects in microscopic detail, into the internal structure of mechanical devices, and even, in *Fight Club*'s opening sequence, through the brain itself, in a tortuous reverse-tracking shot that moves from axons and dendrites to clumps of grey matter, through porous bone and facial pores, and finally down the nose to the barrel of a gun.

[102] Morrison, "The Technology of Homicide," 302.

[103] Morrison, "The Technology of Homicide," 302.

What is particularly manifest in this forensic-necrophiliac quality of contemporary autopsorial cinema is Foucault's modern clinical gaze, which in its desire to penetrate and explore into the body's interiority ultimately takes the dead body as not only its fundamental field of inquiry, but as its condition of possibility.[105] As he explains in closing *The Birth of the Clinic*, this gaze is primarily descriptive, not only saying what one sees, but "showing by saying what one sees,"[106] or in other words, rendering both legible and intelligible the otherwise event-ful experience of "the act of seeing with one's own eyes." For Foucault, this descriptive impetus is revelatory in regard to the way in which the technological/clinical gaze – indeed, very much the gaze which Kracauer has described in his ontology of the cinema – is also deeply connected with images and discourses of death itself. This gaze, Foucault explains,

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[104] Morrison, "The Technology of Homicide," 309. The degree to which the film segments and subsegments the footage is astonishing, making each frame subject to a different kind of scientific/explanatory analysis; as Morrison describes it, "… the Zapruder film is broken down into a frame-by-frame analysis, accompanied by optical enhancements of the frames recording the impact of the wounds. Wounds in turn are broken down into trajectory paths, which are tracked and analyzed to verify the origin and direction of the shot. The bullet (the so-called magic bullet) has its own special history and markings (C.E. 399) and is the subject of intense investigative analysis invoking the assertions of the natural sciences such as physics and geometry." (309) That this relentless segmentation takes the film to the level of the frame (and the register not of cinema, but of photography) is absolutely critical: it kills the "living image" of the scene in motion itself, rendering it a mere material abstraction of reality of the event and its singular horror.

> involved as its field of origin and of manifestation of truth the discursive space of the corpse: the interior revealed. (…) (T)he balance of experience required that the gaze directed upon the individual and the language of description should rest upon the stable, visible, legible basis of death.[107]

The impulse behind the clinical-necrophiliac gaze, which in turn organizes that of the cinema, speaks to a kind of dispassionate yet interested and invested curiosity in (and, in the process, the creation of) the *facticity* of death, which simultaneously permits death's visibility, endows it with an acceptable discursive legibility that denegates its horror and channels its affects, and, at the same time, still provides the conditions for its qualities as a terrible and doleful spectre to be preserved. Foucault demonstrates this and more in his remarkable concluding statement in this section, which resonates with Bauman's appraisal of the modern bourgeois (non-)relation to death, recalls the Ludovico Technique's fundamental political problematics, and forms the foundation upon which he would later construct what Giorgio Agamben has called the "thanatopolitics" of modern power:[108]

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[105] This penetrative and autopsorial thrust is perhaps clearest in David O. Russell's *Three Kings* (1999), in a brief, shocking image that traces the path of an imaginary bullet into the abdomen of a soldier (Mark Walhberg) as his commanding officer (George Clooney) explains the traumatic effects of a gunshot wound. In this image, the camera rapidly zooms into the soldier's clothed midsection and further, instantaneously penetrating through the clothes, skin, and musculature to reveal the clean, glistening viscera of the lower abdominal cavity as the bullet tears through, rupturing the gall bladder which fills the vector-cavity with phosphorescent green bile. And as Russell reveals in his DVD commentary, the image is fastidiously accurate, researched to the last detail through conversations with physicians and reference to autopsorial images in medical journals specific to gunshot trauma.

[106] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 196.

[107] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 196.

[108] Throughout *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben posits thanatopolitics as the necessary complement to Foucault's biopolitics, the power over death (not only "to put to death," which is also a matter of politicizing life, but over defining what counts *as* death, and what death counts *for*) corresponding to the power over life in increasingly indeterminate degrees. "If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics," Agamben says, "this line no longer appears today as a stable

> It will no doubt remain a decisive fact about our culture that its first scientific discourse concerning the individual had to pass through this stage of death. Western man could constitute himself in his own eyes as an object of science, he grasped himself within its language, and gave himself, in himself and by himself, a discursive existence, only in the opening created by his own elimination: from the experience of Unreason was born psychology, the very possibility of psychology; from the integration of death into medical thought is born a medicine that is given as a science of the individual. And, generally speaking, the experience of modern culture is bound up with that of death: from Hölderlin's Empedocles to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and on to Freudian man, an obstinate relation to death prescribes to the universal its singular face, and lends to each individual the power of being heard forever; the individual owes to death a meaning that does not cease with him. The division that it traces and the finitude whose mark it imposes link, paradoxically, the universality of language and the precarious, irreplaceable form of the individual. The sense-perceptible, which cannot be exhausted by description, and which so many centuries have wished to dissipate, finds at last in death the law of its discourse; it is death that fixes the stone that we can touch, the return of time, the fine, innocent earth beneath the grass of words. In a space articulated by language, it reveals the profession of bodies and their simple order.[109]

Here, the body professes in response to the interrogative demand, it is made to speak beyond death, and even to ends beyond itself for which, in any case, it can no longer be "held accountable." There is certainly an interested disinterest at work here, for both science and its subject (each in its own ways mobilizing the meaning of the corpse to its own apprehensive and constitutive ends), but what is remarkable about this passage is how it posits the inexhaustibility of perception and sensation by the descriptive/legibilizing forces which seek to subtend this quality: the fundament of this discourse – the *intractable ineffability* of death with all its epistemic, semic, and inexhaustible affective baggage – is that which both fixes and destabilizes, both motivates and eludes.

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At the intersection of death's facticity and indeterminacy, what is perhaps at the same time most distressing and exhilarating about the image of the corpse is its representativity of finality, as the exhausted husk of life upon which the demands of life can no longer be made to bear: the corpse, in its presence, marking the final turning-away from the exigencies of the world, familiar as figure but exempt from the pressing-forward of time, action, responsibility, and the demands of each; the corpse, in other words, as a terrifying and even joyous figure

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border dividing two clearly distinct zones. This line is now in motion and gradually moving into areas other than that of political life, areas in which the sovereign is entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert, and the priest." (122)

[109] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 197.

of absolute freedom, the subject beyond subjectivity, the once-subject now fully object, giving up any pretense that it was ever anything but, and in this opening upon an absolute beyond which cannot be satisfactorily accommodated in thought, religious or secular, without contravening myth-structures. As a figural-material embodiment of "the end," and hence of the thought of the beyond the end, the corpse is always-already something of a violent image, either "in itself" or in its representation.[110]

The corpse's status as an abject but fascinating point of exclusion from temporal and material demands is manifest in an uncanny long-shot punctuating the Hughes Brothers' *From Hell* (2000), which follows the passage of time and the movement of urban life through the stasis of the corpse: its form the only stable element within a frame of time-lapsed motion, its quiescence tranquil and disquieting amidst the flurry of activity on the city street, its decay as slow and imperceptible as the inexorable entropy of the polluted, criminogenic city-space surrounding it. We have already noted (in the previous chapter) the generally disconcerting quality of the "dead space" without action; here, it is inaction that lies at the center of the frame-space, a core of attraction and repulsion, of arrest and gravitational orbit around which the surrounding action and activity is merely a mobile frame for – and indeed, as any frame, accentuating – the death that lies within. A "stilled life in unreal time," this image of the static corpse amidst the bustling but regimented chaos of the urban landscape brings Barthes' remarks on the corpse in still photography into a more fulsome perspective. Insofar as motion through time – action itself – defines life in all its senses (the cultural/political life of *bios*, the naked yet no less politically qualified life of *zoē*, the life of desire, the life of capital, the life of cinema), this, and even moreso than a purely still image, is a "living image of a dead thing": existing in time, living on and persisting in an entropic vacuum all the more sharply defined relative to the apparently living who surround and pass it.

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[110] Hence the necessity for the funereal viewing: the corpse on display, not as corpse but as image – posed, perfected, peaceful, offering no dread or violence in its empty materiality as it lies perfectly composed and contained within its coffin-frame, and often surrounded by images (photographs, and in some cases, even video) of this husk in animation. The funeral of Andy Kaufmann in Milos Forman's *Man on the Moon* (1999), in which the image of the dead subject, still alive, addresses the living audience from a zone of indistinction between life and death, is symptomatic of this, as well as its implications: the corpse again made incidental to the demands of the living confronted in its absence, the virtuality of the living image substituting for the simultaneous eternality of the transcendent soul and the life in memory. In an age where event, image, and memory bear the most problematic of relations, Bauman argues that "(d)eath, the irrevocable and irreversible event, has been replaced by the disappearance act: the limelight moves elsewhere, but it may always turn, and does turn, the other way. The disappeared are *temporarily absent*; not totally absent, though – they are *technically present*, safely stored in the warehouse of artificial memory, always ready to be resuscitated without much ado at any moment." (*Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, 163)

Indeed, what is clearest in this image is that the presence of the corpse constitutes an intractable impediment to the very motion of the living: it disrupts the flow of street traffic and must be avoided, with a police perimeter demarcating a safe distance and sanctioning routes of passage. The composite pattern of this surrounding movement, its concerted distance from the corpse-image, is crucial here: the police perimeter around the body (a perimeter marked only by the policemen themselves, their bodies roughly staking its invisible but tangible contours, the force of law they represent traversing the space between them, "filling in the gaps") marks a necessary and implied space of avoidance, a zone of distance that repels both contact and attention. This protective sphere is as much in service of the protection of the living as that of the dead object, either as sanctified entity deserving of respect or as forensic evidence to be preserved *in situ*: it is the sphere not only of the generalized function of law as that which as a matter of duty shields the productive (and living) from the exigencies of death and violence, but also as it is informed by the oldest of prohibitions upon contact with the dead, bans which, as Agamben argues, speak to a fundamental aporia of the sacred that, if the content of this image and the curious chill it evokes beyond its cool clinicality is any indication, is very much still with us today.

Throughout *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben addresses how the ambivalence and ambiguity of the sacred fundamentally informs the politicization of life – and, by the same token, the politicization of death – that constitutes sovereign power, and particularly as this fundamental ambiguity comes to bear upon the similarly ambiguous distinction between the pure and the impure. This distinction (which will occupy us more fully in the next section), Agamben notes, draws its structure and enduring force from the Semitic ban (later formalized and broadened by Freud under the rubric of the taboo) on contact with the dead: a proscription resting on the premise of physical and spiritual infection of the pure by the impure and illustrated in William Robertson Smith's 1889 *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, where the author remarks that "(w)omen after childbirth, *men who have touched a dead body* and so forth are temporarily taboo and *separated from human* *society*, just as the same persons are unclean in Semitic religion."[111] In the image above, the law protects from physical contact and, in keeping the crowd in motion, also from sustained ocular contact; the spectatorial attention of the gawker is equally framed as an entry point for infection and the unclean: nothing of the impurity of its arrest in death must escape and take hold upon the living. However – and this is what the schizoid quality of this image most strongly suggests in its dialectic of attraction and repulsion – in the exceptional and spectacular space constituted by this cinema, this perimeter (if not the entirety of its prohibitions) is permitted to be relatively disregarded, the repulsions not only accompanied by but inverted into compulsions to bear safe and distanced witness to the unthought.

Ultimately, what might be most powerful about the corpse is the way in which it reveals the quality and character of biopoliticized life in its unapologetic nudity of death. These images of repellant death that nonetheless refuse to be ignored do more than lasciviously or pornographically invite our attention, whispering to some macabre subjective fascination with death, categorically: rather, they confront us, compel us to return their dead or absent gaze, and in so doing to recognize ourselves in them, they in us. The corpse, in other words, constitutes an *eidolon*: at once a haunting, ghostly figure and an inaccessible, impossibly idealized image (here, unlike the funereal experience, the second characterization is exploded in favor of the first). The embalmed head of "Ms. Hester Mofet" in *The Silence of the Lambs*, peering out from its putrid cage, calls and even pleads for justice to the eyes of those that behold it (Clarice and the audience, perspectivally enmeshed): a voiceless, silent call that goes beyond its silencing, the image itself demanding to be seen and heard, its impossible gaze locked upon us, directly, as it is locked upon Clarice. The shot that concludes the sequence (a sequence, it should be noted, that exists purely for the head's discovery and display: in terms of the film's plot and narrative economy it is an incidental contrivance, a MacGuffin, and as such purely ornamental) is sustained and unbroken; there is no dialogue here that a shot-reverse construction would establish or imply, precisely because no such dialogue is possible. Clarice looks at the head, at us, and it returns her and our look in a way that neither she nor we can answer, struck mute by its unanswerable plaint and the intensive expressivity of its terrible, revelatory *visage*.

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[111] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 76. Citation from Smith, *Lectures*, 152-153. Emphases mine.

PARADIGM IV.B: THE THING (BODY HORROR, MONSTROSITY, & ABJECTION: THE TERROR OF EC-STASIS, "BEYOND FRISSON")

> *There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful – a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside itself.*[112]
>
> Julia Kristeva
> *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*

> *Nothing exceeds like excess!*
>
> "Elvira" (Michelle Pfeiffer)
> *Scarface*

"The corpse," Kristeva says in the opening passages of *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, "seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us."[113] But the corpse, of course, is only one type of image which calls forth distressing ideations and affects in pressing against the noetic limitations that simultaneously inhere in and cohere commercial cinema and spectacular thought: the terms of its comprehension (or at least attempts at comprehension), as much as the quality of the frisson its presence induces, also bear out within images of "body horror" and monstrosity, images of that most recognizable and natural ideality of forms, the human form, elementally distorted or rent asunder. These "bodies *in extremis*,"[114] as John Taylor aptly calls them in *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War*, push and pull the observer between fascination and repulsion, their degrees of de-formation evoking an affective double-bind: the equal and opposite compulsions to look and to look away, the desire and need to see countered by the need and desire to not see, to confront the limits of form and knowledge and to retreat back into their safe and secure bounds.

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[112] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.
[113] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[114] Taylor, *Body Horror*, 2.

The horror of body horror, as the latter is conventionally defined in cinematic terms, lies in the generally anathema graphic (re)presentation of the manifest effects of instrumental violence upon the intelligible image of the materially coherent human form. The palliative concluding shot and assaultive formal-subjective character of *Saving Private Ryan*'s Normandy sequence aside, the most outwardly terrifying aspect of the sequence is in the fleeting images of these broken bodies, alive, dead, or somewhere perilously in-between. An orgy of bodily ruin justified by appeals to absolute realism, the screen is flooded with meticulously accurate renderings of war's ravages upon the flesh: not merely corpses strategically bloodied and neatly riddled with bullets (the conservative, banal signifier of death by war), but *pathologically displayed*, as cadavers for autopsorial investigation, in various states of mutilation – the stumbling, armless soldier reclaiming his lost appendage from the rubble, the faceless body otherwise intact, the intestinal floes springing from abdominal wounds. More than bodies broken, violated, or deformed, these are bodies shattered, deprived of essential parts, and even reduced to elemental anatomical components: an abject parade of the vulnerability of flesh, the failure of anato-metonymy, and the power of instruments of violence (the cinema included) to reveal each.

In the case of Officer Murphy's spectacularly graphic (and, for theatrical release, heavily edited) execution in Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* (1987), we witness a more horrific (if no less "realistic," per se) movement from anatomization to atomization. In this excruciating sequence, the body is reduced not only to its component parts – an arm blown off at the shoulder, a leg torn away at the knee: an anatomization through deprivation – but also to its base liquidity: the atomic bonds tenuously holding together and in place the various solidities of his hand (skin, tissue, sinew, bone) instantaneously broken, the gunshot exploding it into a pulpy, atomized mist, the tenuous fragility of the flesh exposed and baroquely and grotesquely exploited (this movement from flesh to fluid culminates in the case of the film's "melting villain" who, doused in a degenerative toxic waste, explodes in a shower of putrefaction when hit by a speeding car in the film's climax). The fluidity of the material brought to light and sight here is notable: the very integrity of *any* form, emblematized in the thoroughly naturalized formalization of bodily integrity, is presented as precariously dissolute and potentially explosive, straining against the molecular bonds and barriers that unify and hold it in place. Such images are irreducible simply to a means for pleasure (if not, ultimately, for consumption per se): they exceed the affective parameters of what such pleasures allow, they induce and evoke sensations of stunned horror and reflexive disgust that are inassimilable to the codifications of either desire or consciousness, to reason and imagination alike. But the quality of this affect – the "horror" *of* "body horror" – is more variegated than it might first appear and, particularly against Lyotard's theory of the violence of acinematic ec-stasis and abstraction, requires more attention.

As Noël Carroll argues in his germinal *The Philosophy of Horror*, the most atavistic and visceral responses are drawn forth when the order of "natural form" is called into question, when noetic categories are surpassed or denied. He therefore approaches the affects of horror vis-à-vis a "cognitive/evaluative theory of the emotions,"[115] a perspective holding that "an occurrent emotional state is one in which some physically abnormal state of felt agitation" – from the shudder to dread to nausea to a rush of adrenaline – "has been caused by the subject's cognitive construal and evaluation of his/her situation."[116] His taxonomies are exhaustive, but cohesive in their base presupposition: that horrific imagery, in presenting hybridizations, perversions, or inversions of nature and commonsensical notions thereof, affects us so potently and reflexively on both cognitive and emotional registers because it confronts us with images both within and beyond imagination, introducing impurity into the sacred (or worse, revealing the impure within the sacred), and reveling in those defilements in such a way that compels us to act and feel in kind. Horror, for Carroll, always entails and acts upon the level of "paradoxes of the heart": the aporetic and antinomic qualities of thought and feeling (the pleasure of dread, the jouissance of pain, the attraction of and to the repulsive, and so forth) which the genre in question exploits.

Yet as instructive as Carroll's account is, it is also limited vis-à-vis the essential qualities of its "object." The very formalism that makes his account so definitive, in its strict codifications and nominalizations (up to and including his reliance on theories and categories of emotions), is also what keeps him at every turn from apprehending what is truly at stake in horror of any variety, and what is simultaneously the most ill-defined and most central point of return in his entire analysis: the affective, which as a matter of course resists and draws its power from its resistance to codification. The first and most fundamental limitation (though not, in the end, the most deleterious) is in its operative bracketings, which frame the affects at stake as proprietary to a quite limited kind of textual genre (horror as an "imaginative genre" concerned, to varying degrees, with "monsters" that, in their intrinsic impurity, represent a threat to the purity of the self-same) and textual genus (his account is primarily concerned with literature, which vis-à-vis its relative presentational immediacy opens up on entirely different intensities and sensations than the cinema, to say nothing of an entirely different sort of spectatorial attention and expectation). Very much related to this, the second and more substantive limitation is in his attention to horror and its affective domain as a purely aesthetic matter, bracketing its sensations and the conditions under which they may arise as separate and different in kind from what he calls "natural horror": the realm of and relation to factual, historical events and actions. By contrast, in the realm of "art horror" (the domain of fiction, which for Carroll implies its own generic-objective frame), a range of conflicting and complementary visceral affective responses, from thrills to terror to disgust, are simultaneously evoked in the face of various modalities of the overwhelming, unknown, or unknowable. In other words, the *frame as such* is what is critical in the properly aesthetic experience of horror, at once a buffer and an open portal that facilitates what Carroll sees as art horror's unique admixture of pleasure and revulsion.

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[115] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 35.
[116] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 27.

But in the rigidity of this latter distinction and the essentially transhistorical formulations which support it, Carroll on the one hand cannot account for the indistinction between the fictive and the real or the expungement of aesthetic experience in spectacular society, and on the other hand replicates that structure of affect which seeks to allocate such a response to the register of the presubjective or presocial. Indicating the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of the contemporary interpenetration of and indistinction between such categories, John Taylor rejects this distinction between "art-horror" and "natural horror," claiming that, contrary to Carroll's assertion that political and historical events, such as Nazi atrocities, fall under the latter category, no such distinction properly exists. In this, he argues that

> Carroll seems to be continuing the task (begun by eighteenth-century philosophers) of distinguishing relatively distant and aesthetic forms of horror in art from the

> disgusting, murderous experience of harm inflicted on the body by elemental forces, the passage of time, or politics which begs for an historical account.[117]

Beyond the basic premise that "(h)orror is meaningful only because it is historical and cultural" – a claim that one presumes can be agreed upon (and which, as we'll see, Carroll himself somewhat reluctantly acknowledges) – what Taylor attacks here is less the persistence of what he sees as outmoded aesthetic traditions, and more the attendant rationalist compacts encoded into such a distinction which tend to sublate the materiality of these horrific visions as phenomena and in their affects: that is, Taylor's gesture here is to return horror from its rarefied air to the exigencies of material experience and existence, to inject not only an historical perspective into Carroll's more transhistorical account, but a political and ethical perspective as well.[118]

I introduce Taylor's assertions here less to contest or descry Carroll's general theses regarding the quality and character of "horror" as an affect, but instead to supplement them along lines he himself introduces in his book's closing passages. While Carroll remains speculative and skeptical (and particularly regarding the effects of the "emergence" of an epistemic "postmodernity" which would problematize the transhistorical phenomena marking the horrific as a category), he closes his account, in its final sentence, on the historical and social, noting that "(f)or better or for worse, Americans have been irreparably shaken by 'incredible' events and changes for nearly two decades. And horror has been their genre."[119] What is interesting and crucial here is not the statement itself (telling and truthful as it may be), but the ironic accentuation of "incredible." For this gesture implies two important things: first, that the most disruptive or unthinkable of contemporary world events have indeed been received as incredible in the most literal sense (beyond belief), hence putting them in full contact with the categories of knowledge and ideation which Carroll brackets as "properly aesthetic" phenomena, and second, that these events, as much as spectacularized non-events, now share the same space in popular consciousness, that the horrors of the Holocaust and the horror of Dracula are interchangeable today, that the "reality" of natural horror is but an incidental detail, that our spectacularized relation to horror itself, perhaps, no longer demands any distinction or differentiation between the "natural" and the "aesthetic," or for that matter the "political," the "ideological," or the "material." In this, Carroll (intentionally or not, it is difficult to tell, and hardly matters) precisely shores up and supports Taylor's charges against him, and collapses an entire architecture of distinctions and taxonomies which replicate the very structure of knowledge and experience he describes.

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[117] Taylor, *Body Horror*, 37.

[118] Taylor's thesis (a familiar one from a Derridean/Leviasian perspective) is that the affective double-bind of looking/not looking vis-à-vis images of body horror of what Carroll would call the "natural" variety is purely ethical, posing a very real problem in the terms of his specific inquiry for the conscientious practice of contemporary world journalism, which increasingly traffics in images of violences of all varieties upon foreign bodies. While his book is concerned with the ethos of image-production and -circulation in the face of actual human loss and tragedy (the noblest and most urgent of concerns, by any account) in ways that would bear further discussion, we might simply note here that this objectification of death and all the compulsions and affects that accompany it are precisely those that always accompany the encounter with, relation to, and regard for the other, here constituted as an object of representation, an object of knowledge. But the same might be said of the spectatorial relation to – and, moreover, the production of – such imagery in art. In *Art and Fear*, Paul Virilio makes the damning assertion that the production and consumption of "aesthetic horror" is an extension of fascism most murderous, of a pogrom in which producer and consumer are equally complicit: the "pitiless art" of the late-twentieth century "shows all the impropriety of profaners and torturers, all the arrogance of the executioner" (36) in the denigration and abstraction of the human form (from cubism to abstract painting to journalistic photography to self-mutilatory performance art). In this dis-regard for life in favor of a shocking but impostured immediacy that would mendaciously pose itself as a statement against the thanatopolitics of contemporary being-for-image, "(t)his is a TERMINAL ART that no longer requires anything more than the showdown between the tortured body and an automatic camera to be accomplished." (42, emphases his)

In any event and pace Taylor's critique, the structure of sensation Carroll describes is indeed unlike (but not unrelated) to the Kantian experience of the Sublime: here, affects of disgust and repulsion, the very strength, depth, and immediacy of their sensations, fully collapse the requisite distance between the subject and the aesthetic object, yet at the same time allow for a kind of gratification that Carroll sees as both distinct from and incommensurate with that of sublime terror. In a lengthy but critical footnote, he takes great pains (if small steps) to differentiate his account from those of either a Burkian or Kantian sublime in an attempt to account for the attraction to the disgusting that "art horror" presents. His referent here is section 48 of the "Analytic of the Sublime," where Kant explains that

> (t)here is only one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying *all aesthetic satisfaction*, and consequently artificial beauty, viz. that which excites *disgust*. For in this singular sensation which rests on mere imagination, the object is represented as if it were obtruding itself for our enjoyment, while we strive against it with all our might. And the artistic

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[119] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 214.

> representation of the object is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation, and thus it is impossible that it can be regarded as beautiful.[120]

What Carroll isolates in this passage is that, by Kant's terms, "any aesthetic satisfaction is inimical to disgust."[121] Along similar lines, he states that in the case of Burke, where "terrifying objects can cause sublime delight just in case we are not in harm's way of said objects,"[122] we are also confronted with a conundrum, inasmuch as "if we are disgusted by an object, we are, in Burke's idiom, pained by it – genuinely pained by it – and so it does not correlate to the kind of distance Burke maintains the sublime requests."[123]

While this problem of the coordinate attraction and repulsion of "the disgusting" is insoluble for Carroll vis-à-vis Burke and Kant, Kristeva's concept of abjection, which at first blush shares many of its fundaments with Carroll's account, puts this matter into a somewhat clearer context.[124] Loosely represented in the passage presented in opening, abjection – which characteristically defies and evades localization, description, and definition[125] – may be most generally defined as the visceral, simultaneously fascinated and revolted response and relation to that which crosses the boundaries of the flesh – be it blood, excrement, vomit, or other secretions which pass from the interiority of the body to its exterior – which is coded (and, coming from the body, codes its origin) as wasteful, shameful, and impure: its affect is of a profound self-alienation in the failure of a reassuring

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[120] As cited in Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 240 n.20. I have retained Carroll's emphases.

[121] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 240 n.20.

[122] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 240 n.20.

[123] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 240 n.20.

[124] Putting his work at an uneasy distance from Kristeva's, Carroll notes that "the topic of her book does not quite coincide with the topic of this book. This book is narrowly concerned with the genre of art-horror; Kristeva's theorizing is probably meant to encompass this as well as much else. For her, it seems that horror and abomination are metaphysical elements which she connects with an abstract conception of the female (specifically the mother's body), and which she believes we would be advised to acknowledge. I do not know whether Kristeva's meanderings are even intelligible; however, I will not pause to examine them, for her project is of a scope that is probably not ultimately germane to this investigation; it is much larger." (*The Philosophy of Horror*, 221 n.39) Putting to the side the not-so-faintly damning praise here, it is at least worth noting, so as not to do violence to Kristeva's account, that much the same could apply here as well: her account is one that to be fully "comprehended" (if not "intelligibly" understood: Kristeva's oblique and poetic prose is one that is absolutely appropriate to her inchoate "object," and quite at odds with Carroll's formalism) requires a more nuanced treatment of the maternal-feminine than this study can provide – not because it is "metaphysically abstract," but because this constitutes the political thrust of her work.

[125] As Kristeva says in the early going, abjection is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (…) Essentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory." (*Powers of Horror*, 4-5)

méconnaissance with the outside, a sensation expressed in its internalization, wounding in sharp pangs and killing by small but deep degrees.

In many ways, this both correlates to the frisson of the identification with the corpse-image and moves beyond it, concretizing it. On the one hand, Kristeva is keen to note,

> (t)he corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. (…) In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance [or, we might add, the image of the funereal corpse, accommodatingly framed] – I would understand, react, or accept.[126]

But on the other hand, what triggers abjection is not that which signifies death (that is, takes death as a distanced referent, external and objective) but rather cuts to the very zone of indiscernibility between the living and the dead, the productive/producing and wasteful/wasted, a symbolic and visceral immediacy, *a revelation of decadence*: "as in true theater, without makeup or masks," Kristeva says,

> refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver.[127]

In abjection, then, the subject is brought into intimate contact with the most intimate qualities of its being; the body as much recognizes itself in death as it rails against it.

Certainly, in saying that the abject "might then appear as the most *fragile* … the most *archaic* … sublimation of an 'object' still inseparable from drives…" and thus "*the 'object' of primal repression*,"[128] Kristeva makes a problematic appeal to the presubjective which is in many ways at cross purposes with the political content of her critique. Yet the violence of abjection lies not only in the ways that it constitutes a "dark revolt of being" (the body aggressively and shamefully turned against itself, its very necessary processes for being), but also in how its intensity and intension of sensation implodes the cool rationalizing character of the clinical gaze by compelling it inward, the body taking itself as its own pathologized object. In Kristeva's words,

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[126] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3. Brackets mine.

[127] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3

[128] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12. Emphases hers.

> I expel *myself* ... I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*. (...) During the course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects.[129]

What the experience of abjection entails, and what brings it in closest contact with Carroll's general codification of horror as an abreaction to denaturalization, pathology, or perversion, is a fundamental indistinction between the guarantory (and certainly in their own ways atavistic) categories of the sacred and the impure. This indistinction – from which Kristeva's account of abjection proceeds, and which, for Carroll in particular, constitutes the dialectic within which horror as an affective and generic trope emerges – is nothing that abjection or horror introduces, to be sure: rather, it is their common and inaugural point of origin, and its recognition in abjection is what simultaneously accounts for its intensity and resolves (for lack of a better term) the problematic relation between disgust and sublime horror that vexes Carroll's account.

Within his discussion of the "ambiguity of the sacred" and its seeming resolution in the nominal opposition of the sacred and the impure, Agamben briefly notes the problematic nature of any meaningful distinction between disgust and horror, and in so doing may provide us a final point of consideration for the power of this affect and the depth of the historical and political forces which inform its more indiscernible qualities. While calling on Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to elucidate the fundamentally ambivalent character of the sacred in its ambiguous distinction between the pure and the impure, the tenuous distinction between disgust and horror perhaps inevitably emerges. The passage he cites is as follows:

> To be sure, the sentiments provoked by the one [the auspicious: the sacred] and the other [the inauspicious: the impure] are not identical: disgust and horror are one thing and respect another. Nonetheless, for actions to be the same in both cases, the feelings expressed must not be different in kind. In fact, there actually is a certain horror in religious respect, especially when it is very intense; and the fear inspired by malignant powers is not without a certain reverential quality. (...) The pure and the

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[129] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3. Emphases hers.

> impure are therefore not two separate genera, but rather two varieties of the same genus that includes sacred things. There are two kinds of sacred things, the auspicious and the inauspicious. Not only is there no clear border between these two opposite kinds, but the same object can pass from one to the other without changing nature. The impure is made from the pure, and vice versa. The ambiguity of the sacred consists in the possibility of this transmutation.[130]

In this formulation – which Agamben cursorily regards here as "the psychologization of religious experience … the 'disgust' and 'horror' by which the cultured European bourgeoisie betrays its own unease before the religious fact"[131] – a familiar line in the metaphysical sand is drawn, only to be swept away in the same movement: initially, the latter is associated with the sublime, and is thus attractive and compelling, arresting the gaze. Horror is, much as it is for Carroll, framed as an *aesthetic* issue, rather than as the bare and reflexive repulsion in the face of a so-called "natural horror" evident in the former. But at the same time, the fundamental, even originary and aporetic indistinction between the sacred and the impure, which can and is only made distinct in politically vested frames of separation, is laid bare in its arbitrariness by virtue of the non-functionalizable and uncodifiable affects which accompany it (affects, again, that exceed and evade their proper codification: disgust *for* this, sublime horror *in* that, and never the twain should meet in matters so politically potent as bare life and social-symbolic being).

Here as well, Kristeva's concept both becomes most apt and reveals the fallacy of restricting such sensations – and perhaps particularly today, in spectacular society's denigration of the aesthetic as a discrete experiential register of "the truth of things" – to specific representational or experiential categories, as abjection is not a sensation bound only to certain types of representations or experiences, but rather imbricated in *all* facets of experience which confront us with that which is excluded from and denigrated in thought, up to an including the historical as such: as she says,

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[130] Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, 446-448; as cited in Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 77-78. Brackets mine.

[131] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 78. His critique of the psychologization of experience, which is worth noting against Kristeva's confessional-psychoanalytic account but does not, I think, change the terms of our present inquiry, continues to make the claim that "(h)ere, in a concept of the sacred that completely coincides with the concept of the obscure and impenetrable, a theology that had lost all experience of the revealed word celebrated its union with a philosophy that had abandoned all sobriety in the face of feeling. That the religious belongs entirely to the sphere of psychological emotion, that it essentially has to do with shivers and goose bumps – this is the triviality that the neologism 'numinous' had to dress up as science." (78)

> (i)n the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things.[132]

What is crucial here is not how these distinctions are made, nor even that they may or must be made, but rather the fundamental interdependence and indissoluble indistinction between these interrelated affects, neither possible without the other. Thus horror and disgust are not only free to intersect and shift in the affective ambiguity of repulsion and attraction such ambivalent images actualize, but also in so doing cut both ways: walking the fine and quavering line between the spectacular and the sensational, and even, perhaps, constituting the point at which the two meet, becoming indiscernible, and thus precisely constitutive of both the history of the sacred and sovereign ambivalence Agamben describes and the paradox at the heart of Kristeva's intractable abjection.

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What is fundamental to the violence of these images of body horror, then, is *both* the intrinsic decadence *and* extrinsic de-formation of the sacralized human form – its distortion, dismantlement, and even wholesale disregard – which in introducing one register of indiscernibility (the human and the non-human or dehumanized, the unified and the fluid, and so forth) opens upon others, consequently evoking a certain but ineluctable sensation in the presence of the body-in-abjection. As indices of the effects of violence, the images discussed above (primarily images *of* violence) cross those invisible and shifting thresholds that, by way of Zeno's paradox, define the parameters of the permissible in cinematic representation, at once tenuously redefining and tentatively expanding the parameters of the cinematic thought of violence in the process: if not going beyond the limitations of the violent imaginary, then at least introducing into its lexicography points at which those effects simply cannot be assimilated into the pleasurable, transversing the sensationalistic into the realm of sensation.

In this, such images present something of a sadistic inversion of the line of thought that organize Deleuze and Guattari's early collaborations: if their question (ultimately coming to bear on the affective) is "what is this body, what can it do, and what, properly induced, is it capable of," the question posed by these kinds of images, and by the notion of body horror in general, is "what, given what we know through image and imaginary, *is* a body, and what can be done *to* it, pushing it up to and past its conceptual limits?"[133] While the modifications in this question are slight, they introduce a qualitative distinction that affects the way in which this particular brand of body horror is understood: the potentiality of material transformation lies not in the body as such, but rather in external forces bearing upon or implanted within it, against which the weakness of mere material flesh can offer up no resistance. But the horror *of* body horror, the terror *of* monstrosity, need not be housed in or arise from the display of effects of recognizably violent acts: indeed, to the extent that these de-structions are explicitly situated as effects of the enactment of whatever kind of instrumental force, imposed from the outside upon the body, they enter into a preexisting economy of knowledge and comprehension and hence are assimilable to consciousness, and the factual explicitness of the causal relation defuses the more implacable terrors of the distressed body. Absent such explicit instrumental causation, however, the distortion of the human form so central to this cinema may give rise to affects that are far more pervasive and haunting.

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[132] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

Consider, for example, the image of John Merrick (John Hurt) in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), whose radical deformations defy (in the narrative at least) any attempts at aetiological situation, with the effect of rendering the entire plot of the film secondary to the image of Merrick himself.[134] Both terrifying monstrosity and deeply, even warmly human (as evidenced in the expressive qualities of his plaintive voice and bright, accentuated eyes), his visage is such that it both deeply disturbs the ideality of the human form and wrests that ideality (however Pollyannaish it might be to say so) from the "tyranny of mere appearances," yet at the same time cannot be assimilated into any reassuring causational schema. His appearance, his very being, is unqualified and unqualifiable; his tuberous malformations both repulse and, as he is positioned and displayed for the camera's (and scientists') clinical gaze, command our interrogative, awed and awful attention. Similarly, Adrian Lyne's paranoiac *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) is less disturbing in its narrative contrivances and contortions than in the nearly-but-not-quite-human forms that populate its oneiric landscape: faces without eyes or mouths, screaming faces that make no sound, and most remarkably (in a way that recalls most directly the uncanny bodies in Tod Browning's infamous 1932 shock-melodrama *Freaks*), the presence of a menagerie of purely natural deformations more terrible to behold than any aesthetic monster in a hospital/torture sequence cast with dozens of victims of teratogenic Thalidomide exposure, their limbs twisted, splayed, or altogether absent. As more than simply distortions of that most sacred form, but abject aberrancies that occupy an intractably indiscernible register between the human and the inhuman, the sacred and the impure, they command both reverential horror *and* reflexive disgust, they call forth abjection in their manifestation of the body itself turned against or away from the eyes of god, man, and so forth as those eyes turn away from them in kind.

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[133] Indeed, and recalling our discussion of integrality and instrumentality from Chapter Two, this could be understood as a more or less direct articulation of cinematic and spectacularizing processes under late capitalism in general. As Beller suggests, "the experiences of events in the cinema are, from a standpoint of capital, experiments about what can be done with the body by machines and by the circulation of capital. (…) If capital realizes itself as cinema, that is, if industrial capital gives way to the society of the spectacle, one might well imagine cinema, with respect to the body, geography, labor, raw material, and time, to have become the most radically deterritorializing force since capital itself. As production itself moves into the visual, the visceral, the sensual, the cultural, cinema emerges as a higher form of capital – a form capable of coordinating all of the (dialectically) prior moments." ("Capital/Cinema," 83.)

[134] What is still most celebrated about the film (nominated for eight Academy Awards) is less the performances, direction, cinematography, and meticulous reconstruction of the turn-of-the-century Victorian landscape than the admittedly impressive and "convincing" makeup. With this in mind and recalling Jameson's discussion of special effects and "conspicuous production," the attraction to Merrick's grotesque deformities may also be equally understood as a product of the lavish attention, well-advertised, paid in the production the shocking special effect that *is* Merrick.

By the same token, images of the body in transformation also open zones of indiscernibility which disrupt our own living images and their idealities. The remarkable (and, as a truly expensive spectacular effect, Academy Award-winning) transmutation of man to wolf in John Landis' horror-com *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) holds a power that goes well beyond the titillating thrills of disbelief evoked by its considerable technological prowess. The succession of transformations presented here as the body shifts from one state to another is more a montage of deformations-in-progress than anything else, a serial collage of grotesqueries that is both awesome and repellent: a hand stretches and curls, feet extend their length to the extent that the heel becomes the canine knee, the spine arcs upward, its contours straining against skin, and the mouth, in a terrifying scream, is extended and reshaped to lupine form. The transformation itself – what happens to the body, the processes of its becoming-alterior operating from the inside out – is what horrifies in these images, not the final state (a recognizable figure of the horror genre, and for all the attempts to avoid showing the beast "in full," recognizably a man in a puppeteered suit): the zone of indiscernibility, of one flesh and form compelled both by and against its own will becoming another, of the qualitative transformations in bio-molecular movement are what is important (and expensively showcased) here. In his marvelously disturbing rethinking of the Cold-War horror chestnut *The Fly* (1986), David Cronenberg ups this ante in all regards, chronicling the degenerative hybridization of man and insect in obsessive, and unflaggingly repulsive, material and psychological detail, taking the violence of unthought interiorities unleashed and unbounded as its first and final object. To be sure, the clinical elements of anatomization and reduction operative here too (particularly in the "Brundle museum of natural history," where he preserves and organizes his bodily remnants), but in such a way that they represent a different kind of failure of the flesh: "what makes a man" – ears, teeth, fingernails, genitals, and finally eyes and face – are rendered (and melancholically registered as) utterly unnecessary, byproducts of not a descension, but an ascension from one flesh to another.

But in the case of all of these figures, the violence of the sensations they evoke is qualified and constrained, their emergence, presence, and effects mediated to the extent that their encompassing narratives inform them in a certain way: be it the hallucinatory conspiratoriality of *Jacob's Ladder* (echoes of *The Parallax View*) or the clinical and pathologizing interest of science in the unique and aberrant objects of nature gone awry in *The Elephant Man* (shades of *A Clockwork Orange*), there always still an invisible frame around these abject bodies which permits them and, to an extent, facilitates their accommodation to consciousness.[135] Even *The Fly*, which visually and philosophically inhabits the primal dread of the material body-in-transmutation-and-decay more fully (and graphically) than perhaps any mainstream film before or since, finds itself in deeply allegorical-figural territory, its grotesqueries not only framed by an inversion of the "beauty and the beast" mythos, but also fundamentally informed by the shadowy figure of the madness of scientific enterprise, an eidolon extrinsic to but instrumental in the transformation of the body in a way more reminiscent of his 1988 *Dead Ringers* (a fundamentally *human* drama) than of *Videodrome*

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[135] By Carroll's terms, of course, the overarching force here would be less the narrative per se but the genre of horror itself, at least by his relatively loose definition; at the same time, he makes so many disallowances from this genre (notably Cronenberg's film) on grounds that their narratives do not meet the quantifiable standard of requisite elements – rather than the qualifiable standard of actualizing specific affects – that debating this point vis-à-vis his arguments is at best moot.

(1983) or *eXistenZ* (1999), where the internalization of technology is more directly literalized as a trope, introducing and inducing transformations of biotechnological hybridization.[136] Like the haunting Thalidomide victims in *Jacob's Ladder*, the "Brundle-Fly" is posed and framed as figure of a certain violence relative to another: a figuration of the bio-pathological and rooted in the conspiratorially-understood noesis of science run amok.

So however horrifying or disgusting these forms may be, their generic, narratological, and figural frames provide points of reference and return that obviate their affective force. The justificatory situation of these figures within their respective narratives, then, cannot but compromise the degree to which the sensation of abjection to which they speak is able to be fully actualized "on its own terms": in short, the narrative itself, to say nothing of the exigencies of genre as a codifying and palliative force, frames these images in such a way that their affective potentialities are for the most part only actualized within sensationalistic limits. In short, these figures are themselves bound and conscripted to *forces of figuration* which, in the latter's appeals to rationalistic schemas, render the former in procrustean fashion against intelligible schema and within structures of comprehension and justification that ultimately mediate their potential affective qualities.

To concretize this point, we might best return to Deleuze's monograph on Bacon, where he differentiates two kinds of "figures" in representation. As Daniel W. Smith explains, "whereas 'figuration' refers to a form that is related to an object it is supposed to represent, the 'Figure' is the form that is connected to a sensation, and that conveys the violence of this sensation directly to the nervous system."[137] The violence of sensation connected to the Figure is thus different in form and in kind from the cliché violence of the sensationalistic, the latter codified and indirect, refracted as it were through the cathecting cateracts of the familiar, the former cutting through the miasma with an affective immediacy only possible through a derealization of both those formalizing and codifying forces and their manifestations in the images they organize, unfixing the forces of containment in representation and consequently in im-mediated sensation. Actualizing Kantian

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[136] Unsurprisingly given these thematic and generic touchpoints, but at the same time surprising given the excessive grotesquerie of this particular film vis-à-vis the rest of his oeuvre, this was Cronenberg's first (and, until 2005's *A History of Violence*, only) exclusively-Hollywood production, but no less existentially infatuated with the materiality of the body and its tenuous but terrible points of exchange with the violent potential of the mind that mark his entire body of body-work.

[137] Smith, "Deleuze on Bacon: Three Conceptual Trajectories in *The Logic of Sensation*," xiii.

"catastrophes of imagination"[138] and precipitating descents into a chaos of sensibility and sensation, the power and violence of Bacon's Figures is that they inhabit neither the cliché nor full abstraction, but rather a "middle line," and indeterminate hybridization which, in estranging the real and the familiar, simultaneously evokes and gives form in image to the strongest, most intractable, and most abject sensations.

The titular entity in John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1983) points to precisely these notions, and to a degree that exceeds even those disturbing deformations that mark *Jacob's Ladder* or the bodies-in-becoming of *American Werewolf in London* and *The Fly.* In *The Thing, all* notions of bodily integrity and comprehensibility are systematically and ecstatically dismantled; indeed, anthropomorphism is itself conceptually made the target of the film, presenting a monster not only with no recognizable figure or shape, but no fixity in the shapes it might take on. In this, the film exceeds even the body horror of Cronenberg's film, wherein the body of man undergoes a cancerous, metastatic transformation from the inside out, from endoskeletal to exoskeletal, from one discrete taxonomy to a chimerical other, but nonetheless retains a recognizably human form, evoking in the end (and in accord with its melodramatically Baroque tragedy) a comprehending sympathy and empathy proper to that form. Even the biomechanically rendered xenomorphs of *Alien* and the monstrous insectoids evolved to masquerade and hunt in humanoid form in Guillermo Del Toro's *Mimic* (1997), while terrifying enough in their fundamental alterity to mammalian biologies and their capacities to occupy or appropriate the human form, are in their recourse to anthropomorphism monsters that are, in the end, "only human" in their conceptualization, possessed of a bio-logical integrity and formalism that, for all their alterity, is enough grounded in familiarity and hence comprehensibility to render whatever discomfort or distress their appearance may actualize relatively superficial in scope and effect.[139]

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[138] Cf. Smith, "Deleuze on Bacon: Three Conceptual Trajectories in *The Logic of Sensation*," xix-xx.

[139] Scott's film is particularly instructive in this regard: the sum of the film's sense of dread surrounding the xenomorph is drastically undercut by its full reveal in the final reels, not only insofar as its form being recognizably and proportionally human, but also, if on a more simple level, that that form is quite clearly a man in a well-engineered but obvious costume. In addition, the alien's movements are also recognizably human; the error of the sustained reveal (clearly borne as much by the impulse to "put the money invested in the monster on screen" as by anything else) is one that, in his sequel to the film, director James Cameron attempted to avoid by only showing the aliens in motion in the most briefly legible shots (as he astutely noted, the human eye is so attuned to the microphysics of human movement that the illusion of the aliens' "alien-ness" is ruptured when too much is seen for too long a duration).

The absolute alterity of the Thing manifest in its resistance to the forces of figuration also extends to the register of narratological comprehensibility. Whereas *The Elephant Man*, *Jacob's Ladder*, and *The Fly* directly inform their grotesqueries against the backdrop of a familiar and essentially replicative critique of the Cartesian legacy (in the case of the first, the brutality of taxonomizing aberrancies; in the second, the uncanny appearance of actual victims of teratogens coupled with the narrative's conspiratorial overtones of psychotropic experimentation on unwitting human subjects; in the last, the hubristically reckless character of scientific enterprise itself, regardless of its effects on life, to create knowledge by bending and rewriting the laws of nature and physics), wherein the body is an object-ive field upon which epistemological violence is enacted and comprehensible by rationalist terms and narratological rationalizing maneuvers, the Thing is *completely alien*, literally and figuratively. Apart from its extraterrestrial origin cursorily established in the film's brief opening shot, it is never explained, nor is it explainable: subtending and subverting all taxonomizing and nominalizing attempts even within the narrative (the victims, a scientific team, attempt a series of experiments to gain knowledge of the Thing to isolate and defeat it, but, as their object will not stay still, no means or method is adequate to that end), *it simply is*. It is the materiality of flesh growing of its own accord, without dependence on consumption to grow, a formal and biological fluidity – improvisational, immanently mutable, and axiomatic – uncontained by vessel or skin, a corporeal structure both exo- and endo-skeletal, inside and outside interchangeable and uncontained, faceless and many-faced, eyeless and many-eyed, a body not so much without organs as with/as all organs, an entity both in and of itself and of and in others, unlocalizable as object and impossible to taxonomize by any biological standard (save, perhaps, the viral). It is both the limit and thought of nature "itself," unbounded and unfixed, always fluid in form, ambiguous in its intentions, inscrutable and inscrutinizable. The word "monster" hardly suffices: it exists and affects in excess of ideation or ends, form or flesh – chaos *incarnate*.

And if the Thing is indeterminate vis-à-vis the thought of figures or figurations of nature (human or otherwise), it is all the moreso in terms of its potential political figuration. Unlike its contemporary Cold War monsters, it is a figure of neither "capitalism" nor "communism" (unlike the shark in *Jaws*, a figuration of both nature beyond natural law and the axiomatic force of corporatization that threatens the "amity" of the provincial economy while machinically "swimming, eating, and making little sharks," or the apian hive-mind of the biotechnical *Alien*, a "perfect organism" that only an android or corporation can appreciate, and which, as rearticulated in James Cameron's 1986 sequel, *Aliens*, surrenders its being in the service of the communal good). The Thing has no such purpose; indeed, it has no intelligible purpose at all: beyond economic figuration, *beyond economy*, it is an end in itself, and is never complete in its genesis; part genetic bricolage, part perpetual-motion machine, part simulacral machine, potentially persisting even when invisible, inspiring both horror and disgust in its fleshly manifestations and (on-screen, at least) fear, doubt, distrust, murder, and suicide in its dormancy. In all these ways, and spectacular as it is, the Thing is more than spectacle, and far more than any figure or figuration: the Thing is Figure, and hence sensation; the Thing, as an image of abjection which in every way corresponds with its singular affect, is abjection. And in its ec-stasis of fungible form and the sensations it calls forth, unfixable as it fixates, unassimilable as it assimilates, and acinematic in its absolute abstraction of figuration and economy, *the Thing is violence.*

PARADIGM V: THE CHAOS-IMAGE
(IMMANENT TENSIONS, STRAINING FOR RELEASE)

> *Social space is now completely saturated with the culture of the image; the utopian space of the Sartrean reversal, the Foucauldian heteropias of the unclassed and the unclassifiable, all have been triumphantly penetrated and colonized, the authentic and the unsaid,* in-vu, non-dit, *inexpressible, alike, fully translated into the visible and the culturally familiar.*[140]
>
> Fredric Jameson
> "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity"

> *Art in the period of its dissolution, as a movement of negation in pursuit of its own transcendence in a historical society where history is not yet directly lived, is at once an art of change and a pure expression of the impossibility of change.*[141]
>
> Guy Debord
> *The Society of the Spectacle*

> *There are only two constants: entropy and chaos. I wanted to make a film that captured both.*
>
> Director David Fincher, on *Fight Club*

In David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), a film rife with spectacular and often revelatory images set against a thematic backdrop of a nameless subject's attempts to escape the deadening and dispersions of bourgeois late-capitalist existence, a singularly violent and perhaps fully acinematic image emerges, in a startling shot where the field of the screen and the cinematic frame strain against each other, oscillating and interpenetrating.[142] Out of a lap-dissolve from the immolation of a storefront, Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) is revealed in a darkened, decaying room, his back to the camera. Speaking to an unseen person – himself, the audience, any listener at all – he lays out a nihilistic, vulgar-Marxist diatribe ("You're not your job. You're not how much money you have in the bank. You're not the car you drive. You're not the contents of your wallet. You're not your fuckin' khakis. You're the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world.") as he turns to face the camera, which slowly zooms to meet his bruised and unshaven face until it fills the screen in an extreme close-up. His words begin to become indistinct in the increasingly cluttered and warped soundtrack, noise and voice reverberating throughout the soundstage in a sonic chaos. And with this, the frame begins to vibrate laterally, slowly at first, then faster and faster, the distortion of the image intensifying in direct proportion to the distortion of the soundtrack. By the end, the vibration becomes so rapid, so violent, that the spokes of the film itself – the celluloid's outermost boundaries, its hidden mechanisms of movement – appear at the sides of the screen in fleeting but distinct flashes, as if the film itself and the very world and forces it contains are coming off the reel, off the screen itself. The words and face are now indiscernible, celluloid and its subject indistinguishable; this *person* who was seen moments ago – unified, determined, and beautiful despite the bruising – now has no voice, face, or image of its own as they wrestle to escape the frame that defines and coheres them. The shot stabilizes in time for Tyler to abruptly turn away, returning to darkness and the indistinct focus of the out-of-field.

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[140] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, 111.

[141] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 135.

[142] The underlying cliché that is extended and hyperbolized here is common to the horror genre and to Fincher's preferred neo-noir cinematography as a whole: the inky blackness of the darkened frame bleeds of the boundaries of the screen, connecting scene-space, screen-space, and auditorium-space, and figures fade into and emergence from the impenetrable dark, its opacity fragmenting and obscuring their forms, shattering them into barely-glimpsable slivers of light.

As a diptych of the consumption-images of *The Matrix*, and in ways that far surpass the arrests introduced by instruments, corpses, or monstrous forms, this image does not, in and by itself, drive or advance the movement of the narrative or its economy of desire in any way: it does not simply *disturb* its movement and momentum, but fundamentally, even irretrievably, *destroys* it, entropically pockmarking the smooth linearity of its progression in a recursive and reflexive fold. In the shot described above – which I will call a "chaos-image" – we find an image that leaps from and directly, even apocalyptically reveals the internal tensions and conflicts of the cinema itself, a *schizophrenic image* contesting its polarities of motility and stasis, emission and interpellation, confronting its ownmost limits, its own unthought, oscillating wildly within and shaking violently against them. Jameson, distilling and channeling Deleuze, says that "ideal schizophrenia constitutes an alternative to capitalism and stands as its external limit,"[143] and in the chaos-image, that limit is revealed and violently negotiated.

As singular as this image is, there are other cinematic chaos-images in recent memory which share its gestures, if not the extremity of their degree: the convexion of the mirror-image framed within the frame in Brian DePalma's *Carrie* (1976); the nightmarish visage of the static, legless torso with the vibrating head that punctuates Adrian Lyne's paranoiac *Jacob's Ladder*, *Natural Born Killers'* (Oliver Stone, 1994) psychotropic facial distortions that mutate and liquefy both face and voice; the stuttering movement of the ghost in David

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[143] Jameson, "Marxism and Dualism in Deleuze," 20.

Koepp's *Stir of Echoes* (1999), as if frames had been cut from its image alone; the frame-filling close-up of a madman's eye in James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989), uncanny as it shifts in its orbit because the footage runs backwards, denaturalizing the most intimate and invisible of gestures. Principles of aberrance are at work here, upending and confronting the task (as Lyotard has noted) incumbent upon this cinema to eliminate such dissonant effluvia from the film's coordinated economies of images and desire. But chaos-images are neither specific to cinema nor to its present moment: rather, they are immanent to the codes and conventions of any representational medium, grounded firmly in conditions and traditions within and against which they emerge. In the case of Francis Bacon's work, for example, we find chaos-images in painting; Deleuze, without naming it as such, began to explore the problem of the chaos-image, with its defamiliarizing and deterritorializing lines of force, well before he began to consider cinema at all. As Bogue puts it, such images are the expression of a medium's expressive potentiality, of a form's expressive experimentation both with and beyond itself:

> Each art experiments with itself, testing its limits by making visible the invisible, audible the inaudible, sayable the unsayable. Each art experiments with forces, the various work of a given art as much inventing and discovering the forces they harness.[144]

Yet the violence of the chaos-image, let alone the possibility of its expression, is of course deeply and denegatively problematized by the very film-system that permits its emergence: it is always the case, as Deleuze concisely notes, that "(t)he cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world,"[145] an economy and logic of the set which permits inclusions and renders them (and itself) coherent. But at the same time, the emergence and even proliferation of chaos-images is *absolutely logical* in contemporary commercial cinema, a medium and space in which anything is not only *technologically possible*, but *technically permissible*. In this, and despite the multiple and multiplied forces of containment and constraint that organize the medium formally, ideologically, and affectively, this fundamental permissibility (however inflected or driven by market forces and demands) for the medium to push against its limits, even to do violence to its beholden traditions, tendencies, and formations, is precisely what *demands* the production of such images, precisely what *compels* them to come forth. This, to be sure, is less a matter of the medium's increasingly technologically perfected ability to translate authorial or artistic imagination into image (a Bazinian sentiment), or of the more general techno-ontological capacity to present the previously un(re)presentable (also Bazinian, by way of Kracauer) than an expression and fulfillment of its fundamental logic as a zone of potentially limitless potentiality, a space wherein the im-possible, and by this the im-permissible, is no longer a factor, the logical endstage from a set of necessary conditions and compulsions where, with nowhere left to reframe and refold, the medium can and must take on, take in, objectify, interrogate, and reframe itself.

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[144] Bogue, "Gilles Deleuze: The Aesthetics of Force," 268.
[145] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 68.

Indeed, in *Fight Club*, that "world" surrounding this image *is no less than the cinema itself*, as an analogon of spectacular society and, by extension, of cinematically-constructed perception: a world of unfigurable chaos before and within the very structure of the Narrator's schizoid late-capitalist image-consciousness, caught in an eternal present to which it can only relate via cinematically constructed and conceptualized images – a *cinephrenic* world, in its entirety, that this single image implodes. In this image, we witness the anarchic dissolution of everything that defines this cinema, materially, ideologically, aesthetically, and affectively: the face and the frame as forces of containment and definition; the sensed and self-imaged immateriality of the medium, up to and including the inviolability of its illusions and its promises; and finally, from this revelation and immolation of its own materiality, the obfuscation of the medium's true conditions of possibility: circulation and money. The chaos-image, in its destabilization of the very structuring forces and fields which are the fundament of contemporary commercial cinema, is more than tendentially *acinematic* – it is aggressively *anticinematic*.

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The image and its a(nti)cinematic gestures begin and end with the face, and it is a crucial origin. As a field of right and return, as a locus of identification and individuating figuration, and as the always-political and -ethical nexus of expression, communication, vision, and affection, the face, as Bogue notes, "is the most heavily coded zone of the body and hence the point at which the effects of diastolic forces are most pronounced."[146] Along these lines, Agamben provides a useful framework for understanding why in the chaos-image it is so often the face that is the primary target for such an aggressive decomposition, displacement, or fragmentation – why, indeed, it even invites these latter:

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[146] Bogue, "Gilles Deleuze: Aesthetics of Force," 261.

> Inasmuch as it is nothing but pure communicability, every human face, even the most noble and beautiful, is always suspended on the edge of an abyss. This is precisely why the most delicate and graceful faces sometimes look as if they might suddenly decompose, thus letting the shapeless and bottomless background that threatens them emerge. But this amorphous background is nothing else than the opening itself and communicability itself inasmuch as they are constituted as their own presuppositions as if they were a thing. The only face to remain uninjured is the one capable of taking the abyss of its own communicability upon itself and of exposing it without fear or complacency.[147]

The face-image – that is, the face and its faciality harnessed and reified in imagistic form – is thus always-already fragile and unstable vis-à-vis its ability to express and communicate – that is, to fulfill its function qua face – and, in spectacular society, can only fulfill this function by disrupting, even abandoning, its reified artifice (Bacon, as much as Munch, understands this, and it finds its expression in *Fight Club*'s chaos-image as well: the scream destroys the face-image, the force of its expression distorting and destroying the vessel). The face, then, always comes up against its own limitations: it *wants* to speak, its *wants* to recognize and be recognized, but it is in this inevitable failure (intensified by the existential politics of late capitalism and its shattering effects, this crisis of expression and affection reified into the banalized pop catchphrase, "a failure to communicate") that this most supposedly stable and sacred of images, the most comforting and revered, the sovereign guarantor of identity and the identity of the human and the divine, risks abandoning all its inherent characteristics. And if the face in cinema is always, already something of an event, its deformation or destruction is even moreso: a face without form, a mouth without voice; what could be more terrifying, more *monstrous*?

And when that most sacred and affectively overdetermined image, that inhuman but humanized nexus of identity, becomes something decidedly *not* ideal, one confronts, as one confronts the horrible repressed memory of a trauma, the realization that all is not well with this world, all is not well with this *one*. If class consciousness is only to be achieved by the fruition of the most extreme alienation, if one can only psychically heal by bringing oneself to the brink of psychic death (a kind of mental chemotherapy), then the chaos-image, in its destruction of both face and frame, enacts the worst violence upon the imagistic register in order to both redeem the face and return the image to its proper, secondary place in human experience, breaking, *if only for a moment*, with what Agamben calls the "mythical rigidity of the image."[148] The dissolution of the face-image in the chaos-image, then, represents in the same movement the dissolution of both the face *and* the image, independently considered, as unities and identificatory nexuses, thereby in one gesture shattering both the artificial unity of the image and the impossible identification with the reified face.

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[147] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 96.

But this image does not end its anticinematic gestures with the face and the image: it calls back into question and consciousness the cinematic entire, the frame from which it emerges – a metacinematic frame, a film that is expressly and self-referentially about the multiple submissions and separations entailed in spectacular-spectatorial consciousness – both enabling/demanding the image's emergence and inclusion as an expressive elaboration of its thesis and in so doing fulfilling in form its otherwise vulgar-Marxist, neo-Bataillean line in narrative content: the reconnection to the materiality of experience via violence and the abandonment of the bourgeois consumer morality that codifies and constrains expression, sensation, and the whole of a mode of existence, yes, but also, as a means to that ultimate end in the film's plot, the destruction of the circulation of capital that, in cinematic spectatorship and spectacular society alike, keeps all in debt and in check. As Deleuze observes, "(m)oney is the obverse of all the images cinema already shows and sets into place, so that films about money are already, if implicitly, films within the film or about the film."[149] In this case, the converse of this statement can also be observed: films about films or films within the film are implicitly about money, tacit reflections on and recognitions of its innermost enabler and antagonist, its condition of possibility and fundamental limit.

But can this self-referentiality simply be seen, *in itself*, as a fundamentally and perhaps characteristically empty gesture, as the film simply wallowing in its own eternal now and conditions of possibility via the use of this type of self-reflexive image (which, to be sure, is very much its own cliché in the post-Tarantino landscape)? Is this particular image, as a marker and reminder of the film *as* film, and placed within the larger, recursively referential structure of the film as series of spectacularly, cinematically-remembered moments, little more than another symptomatic expression of a grand recycling (here, the medium recycling, and only incidentally or accidentally reflecting upon, its material conditions) that marks the endpoint of its conceptual movement, its ownmost "end of history"? Perhaps not completely, for as Deleuze also notes,

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[148] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 55.
[149] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 76.

> the film within the film does not signal an end of history, and is no more self-sufficient than is the flashback or the dream: it is just a method of working, which must be justified from elsewhere. In fact, it is a mode of the crystal-image. If this mode is used, then it has to be grounded on considerations capable of giving it higher justification.[150]

In *Fight Club*, where the film-within-the-film is both the Narrator's inner schizophrenic monologue with his alter-ego, Tyler Durden, constructed *qua film* (i.e., as pure and cine-conventional imaginary, replete with a surrogate protagonist in Tyler, femme-fatale love interest in Marla (Helena Bonham Carter), and conspiratorial adversaries, in turn, in the Narrator's supervisor, his workplace, consumer society, Marla, Tyler, and finally himself within image-culture as a whole), set against a *mise-en-scène* of the *ecstatic stasis of the eternal now* as the existential-experiential condition of postmodernity, this "justification" is purely immanent to late capitalism and cinema alike: it comes from the schizoid and virtualized consciousness of spectacularized subjectivity existing both inside and outside the film. It is a moment not of reveling, but of revealing, of tension straining for release from constraint, of working-through these conditions, not working-with.

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What the "chaos-image" represents – and I use this word with no small degree of trepidation – is precisely that zone of indeterminacy and violence (indeed, the coordinate violence of indeterminacy), that zone of the potentiality of *puissance*, of the cinematic image (qua *imago*) that, in its maturation, has reached its own boundaries, vibrating against them. Not unlike the simultaneously explosive and entropic "still(ed) lives" in Bacon – those frozen but motile moments of becoming caught within the suspended indeterminacy between planes of motion and stasis, figure and abstraction – the chaos-image too comes to the brink of its limits and conditions of possibility, but does not, and indeed *cannot*, go beyond them. In the end, these limits are stronger than what the image contains: the master-frame of the screen as the field upon which the image cannot not manifest itself, the self-regulative inertia of both the film's economy of images and the audience's condition vis-à-vis the dynamics of affective reification, and the simple yet inescapable necessity for the show to go on always have the upper hand and the last word. And so the image rattles in its cage; its potential is revealed but not fully realized, not because it does not desire, but because *it simply cannot go further.*

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[150] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 76.

What both marks and haunts the chaos-image, then, is not only its instability "as image" – that is to say, its material instability within its contextual frame, its functional stability within the cinema's economy of images, and even its affective instability – but also the precariousness of its aberrant singularity; indeed, in order *to be* they *must be* ephemeral events, Benjaminian strikes of lightning amidst a noisy storm, resigned to be promptly forgotten by the conditioned amnesia of the audience. The decomposition is inevitably recomposed: that the vibrating face-frame again "comes to its senses" and restabilizes, returning to and restoring the consistency of the cinematic flux as the film subsequently enters its *dénouement*, shores up its incapacity to endure and affect. Firmly couched in its temporal and affective ephemerality, the chaos-image is a moment contained in and even by its event-ness, reconciled as "mere event" within the larger set of causal relations that comprise (the) narrative: the myriad violences of even this most violent of images cannot be carried beyond its local effects, as a single drop of arsenic in the well that poisons no one.

The forces of repetition and return so central to the formal language and commercial demands of Hollywood cinema can, and do, work actively to negate the violence of the acinematic image; as Lyotard succinctly observes, "(a)ll so-called good form implies the return of sameness, the folding back of diversity upon an identical unity."[151] Because, time and again, from the calculated arrangement of plot elements to the reassuring return of the initially aberrant image (a return that, of course, reveals the alienating, unsettling aberration as meaningful, purposeful, and reassuring calculation), "its movement of return organizes the affective charges linked to the filmic 'signifieds',"[152] this cinema inexorably self-corrects against its own excessive and even self-destructive impulses. While in its initial appearance the chaos-image embedded within *Fight Club* presents an uncannily direct visualization of the crisis of the image in the integrated spectacle, constituting a concerted counter-violence to the very core of spectacular society that goes far beyond the film's snarkier self-referential moments, when it reappears (and, as such a spectacular image in its own right, how could it *not?*), it is modulated to include shifts between the Narrator's face and Tyler's, becoming in its repetition something quite other: a mere device, a flashback of narrative elucidation and literalized figuration of faux-schizophrenia (the oscillation between narratologically defined and psychoanalytically codifiable individualities) that almost negates in memory the haunting effect of its first appearance: its affective *puissance*, like the horror of Bacon's screams, effectively lost once narrativized.

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[151] Lyotard, "Acinema," 352.
[152] Lyotard, "Acinema," 353.

Ultimately, we might well be justified in situating the fate of such images and their reception as Lyotard does, in his lament that

> (t)he affective charges carried by every type of cinematographic and filmic 'signifier' (lens, framing, cuts, lighting, shooting, etc.) are submitted to the same rule absorbing diversity into unity, the same law of return of the same after a semblance of difference; a difference that is nothing, in fact, but a detour."[153]

Yet the simple fact of its arising from such conditions of *im*possibility marks the chaos-image as an event in the purest sense: relative to its conditions of possibility and permissibility, it is an image that realizes the unexorcizable potentiality of the image to address and confront itself qua image, for the cinema to confront itself qua cinema; however incompletely, however much it remains ultimately bound by both the rigidity of the material frame and the embedded codes and conventions of the cinema itself, it is undeniably a *catastrophic image*. By this token, the chaos-image as much an expression of acinematic praxis (that is, actively or fully anti-cinematic as a tactical means to a strategic end) as *a cinematic gesture*: it is both that "pure movement" of which Lyotard speaks (the force of motion breaking free, emancipating itself from its bounds, even to the point of setting its surrounding world into aberrant motion) and an expression unbound from and in excess of any instrumental or instrumentalizable end.

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[153] Lyotard, "Acinema," 353.

EXTERSTICE:
THE DISTINCTION, SUSPENDED

> *I think that all images combine the same elements, the same signs, differently. But not just any combination's possible at just any moment: a particular element can only be developed given certain conditions, without which it will remain atrophied, or secondary. So there are different levels of development, each of them perfectly coherent, rather than lines of descent or filiation. That's why one should talk of natural history rather than historical history.*[154]
>
> Gilles Deleuze
> "On *The Movement-Image*"

These paradigmatic image-types – and particularly the ways in which their perceptual, ideational, and ultimately affective violences are constrained, shunted, and redirected – each in their own ways mark an epistemological shift (with political and ethical consequences) coincident and concomitant with the logic of global capitalism: the abstraction of causality and the faux-"anything-goes-ness" of the so-called "postmodern aesthetic," a reflection of a state where "(m)any things may be unauthorized; everything is permitted,"[155] or what Agamben calls, in a different context but to a similar end, a paradoxical and dangerous state of permanent exception. Within this cinema (to say nothing of images in general), nearly anything is permissible so long as that which occurs within or arises from the totality of their effects may be recoded: in other words, so long as the *integrity of the frames* holds strong, what lies within, insofar as it *can* be framed, can be made a means to whatever end. Within the perpetual present of late capitalism, the spectacle's tendential "paralysis of overall historical development,"[156] concomitant with its operational symbioses of image and capital, axiomatic economic expansion and the homogenization of experience and expectation, the potentiality for *any* image to controvert or subtend the economies which give it place is certainly limited, the consequences – and more than simply "on the face of things" – dire; as Debord laments, "(i)f henceforth the *free space of commodities* is subject at every moment to modification and reconstruction, this is so that it may become ever more identical to itself, and achieve as nearly as possible a perfectly static monotony."[157]

But such a sentiment, however truthfully it bears out in all regards, perhaps goes too far in its determinism: even the black hole emits particles, something always breaks free. That something may be of the same stuff as the singularity, it shares its atoms, even a kernel of its logic. But once it escapes, and by virtue of its escape, that something is qualitatively changed. And though different in kind, it may be easily overlooked, even ignored, assumed to be one of the same, misread. It may even be sucked back in, reassimilated, not as punishment for dissent but by the inevitability of the simple mechanics of corrective, gravitational force. But sometimes, even in the smallest, subatomic way, the free radical breaks loose, effectuating other radicalizations that on large or small scales can change the nature of the whole. This, and perhaps only this, is how the image in the age of the integrated spectacle might do violence to its own order, even to itself.

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[154] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 49. From Deleuze, "La photographie est deja tiree dans les choses," interview by Pascal Bonitzer and Jean Narboni, *Cahiers du Cinema* 352 (October 1983), 37.

[155] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 22.

[156] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 124.

[157] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 120.

As noted in opening, all images of violence are potentially violent images; certainly, by this point, we might supplement this statement by saying that indeed *any* image may potentially enact a certain violence, depending precisely upon the manner in which it is received, and potentially quite apart from the manner in which it is motivated. And while we have posited two general polarities (those which affect by instrumentalized force on the one hand, those whose evocations are unpredictable on the other) within and between which such images may emerge, function, and be recognized, they are not by their general distinctness necessarily that simple to discern; indeed, power and potentiality – the polarities of *puissance* itself – too may merge, transform, reverse. Even as hyperbolae, in the fluxus of the outwardly singular imagistic regime these images, their effects, and their affects share their grey areas, and may slide into, over, and through one another, in a kind of imagistic conservation of energy in the intrinsically unstable and destabilizing economy of violence of which both polarities are a part.

In their ambivalent habitation within this constant negotiation between the stasis of affective reification and the ecstasis of uncodified sensation, these images, wherever they might be situated in (or in relation to) this continuum, both present new potentialities for the thought of violence within and beyond the terms and codifications of the violent imaginary and prove positive a critical visual turn. "Every picture tells a story," the truism goes; here, the *single* cinematic image most fully takes its place among the hermetic image-narratives of its photographic forebears, confronting us with the conditions of our time, of time itself, in "real time," each constituting a violence that, in image and effect, may supplement or bolster our expectations and experiences of the violence of images, each encompassing and speaking through its own set of perceptual and conceptual frames, each self-contained by relation or design, standing on their own, apart from any whole – these potential violences to continuities of knowledge, perception, and sensation inheres within the very nature of these images, and indeed is enabled and even embraced by the very nature of the spectacle which organizes them. Again, this is not to say that there is a clean and determinate line between these two affective registers which might allow for a likewise clean and determinate taxonomy of images; rather, they represent two hyperbolized polarities that the image in late capitalism may tend towards, and each type contains the potential for actualizing either tendency, even both.

The depth of this ambivalence, and the force of its resolution, is perhaps most evident in "bullet time," where the very focus on the temporal (and even the historical) enacts a certain violence, a movement against the dilatory eternal now, by presenting an image of its conditions: insular, circular, suspended, spectacularly satisfying, a cycle of perpetual seduction and consumption. But in this image of "automatic time," itself of a piece with the spectacular world which surrounds the cinema itself, we and images alike become subject and surrender *to* a modality in which events become spectacularized and reified in a perpetual present of infinite debt and deferral, infinite dread and specular seduction. In a certain sense, then, the violence of *The Matrix*'s "consumption-images" *is* fully realized and actualized, inasmuch as they fulfill the ultimate, instrumental ends of the spectacular power-image: the maintenance and intensification of the consumptive drive within the greater frame of the virtualization of all relations, of all nature, of experience and existence itself. And while they certainly usher in new modalities of perceptivity – the virtual zone of the image breaking beyond the constraints of previous mechanical perspectives, to say nothing of that most *im*perfect machine, man – and give rise to sensations and affective intensities coordinate with those trespasses of all registers of the possible – from subjective imagination to technological innovation, including even an engagement with our consciousness' limits and conditions of constraint – in the end, these modalities have always-already been reterritorialized, zoned for commercial business, permitted to the extent that they are permissible by the terms of contemporary cinema, the integrated spectacle, and their happily complicit subjects: like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*, we and images, again, alike.

But both because and despite the multiple concerted forces which permit and constrain them, what the preceding paradigms also have in common is that they nevertheless open in and to thought and feeling zones of indistinction, all introducing a certain chaos upon the screen, and consequently into our own screens. And it is this latter field, and perhaps it alone, which is both the most profound center of indeterminacy and ultimately determinate as to how such images and their affective intensities may be registered and enact their violence, if any at all, in the event *of* their encounter. For as Deleuze notes in *The Fold*,

> (e)vents are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes. Chaos does not exist; it is an abstraction because it is inseparable from a screen that makes something – something rather than nothing – emerge from it. (…) If chaos does not exist, it is because it is merely the bottom side of the great screen, and because the latter composes infinite series of wholes and parts, which appear chaotic to us (as aleatory developments) only because we are incapable of following them, or because of the insufficiency of our own screens.[158]

In the end, the most violent image the cinema could afford is one that only occurs by accident: the blow-out arising from the failure of the apparatus, the locking and immolation of both the image and the promise that more images are to come, an apocalyptic meltdown immolating all investments. In their revelatory disruptions, destabilizations, suspensions, and alienations, the violent images we have explored in these pages – and the catastrophic chaos-image most so – gesture toward such an apocalypse, *approximating* its experience and violent potential. But, as we will consider in the next and final chapter, such an extreme violence is one that this cinema is perhaps most ill-equipped to represent, let alone to think.

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[158] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 76-77.

CHAPTER FIVE
MILLENNIALISM & MELANCHOLIA, OR, APOCALYPSE NOW!/?: A POSTSCRIPT ON THE DEFERRAL OF VIOLENCE & THE VIOLENCE OF DEFERRAL

There is nothing more dismal than a dead God...[1]

Julia Kristeva
Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia

Our fathers were the model for God, our fathers bailed; what does that tell you about God? We're God's unwanted children ... It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything.

"Tyler Durden" (Brad Pitt)
Fight Club

I am Jack's wasted life.

"Narrator" (Edward Norton)
Fight Club

PREFACE:
"IN A MOMENT..."

In the final seconds of 1999, the Western world stood at a breathless standstill. Prophecies, both biblical and techno-secular, had foretold a cataclysm of dire proportions: if not the coming of Armageddon, then something remarkably like it on a technological scale, the cessation of computer function, the erasure of financial records, the collapse of the stock market, even the accidental commencement of global nuclear warfare. After a decade of giddy revelry and cultural self-congratulation, matched with unprecedented yet providential financial growth and technological progress, an instantaneous collapse – indeed the apocalypse itself – seemed frighteningly possible. At the dawn of the "new millennium," time froze for a few eternal seconds in ecstatic anticipation of a potential and potentially wholesale chaos. And then nothing happened. God – theologically or secularly conceived – hadn't come to the party, and without RSVP. Yet everything commenced, same as before, and the revelry began again as that concentrated moment of anxiety was completely forgotten in the briefest of instants.

The final decade of the 1900's also marked a notable (and well-noted) movement in

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[1] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 8.

Hollywood cinema, characterized by a flood of films we, however problematically, might be quick to dub markers of "postmodern excess." Spectacular imagery and fractured narrativity, triumphs of cinematic technique and technical (if not philosophical or political) potential, both reflected the ecstatic millennial frenzy and obscured – or more properly worked to obscure – something more fundamental to a striking number of these films: a deep sense of personal yearning, of the loss of self, of purposefulness itself. This sentiment was manifest in remarkable numbers in Hollywood's 1999 releases: from the wandering, disillusioned soldiers of the telegenic Gulf War in David O. Russell's *Three Kings* to the simulacral consciousnesses and sentient chimpanzees of Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich*, from the rotten suburbanity of Sam Mendes' insular *American Beauty* to the drifting and forlorn nomadic populace of P.T. Anderson's epic *Magnolia*, and finally in the hallucinating, disillusioned daysleepers teetering on the edge of sanity in Martin Scorsese's elegiac *Bringing Out the Dead* and David Fincher's anarcho-apocalyptic *Fight Club*, something distinctly dolorous and poignant was rippling beneath and lapping through the ecstatic, flamboyant technique.

That something, time and again, was the elegy for a newly recognized, deeply fractured and quiescent subjectivity, a brooding sense of stasis and entropy, a profound neuraesthenia and melancholia accompanied by an impulse to escape these personal prisons through their destruction. These figures-in-crisis are no less than the legible, revelatory indices of a generalized if generally subterranean melancholia marking and arising from the conditions of late capitalism: a loss of meaning, of center; a neo-Baroque sense of eternal ruination, temporal stasis, entropy and suspension; a wholesale failure of symbolic means that desperately seeks a decisive solution and recentering in mythic figurations. In other words, they are both the symptom and the outcome of the violence of the spectacle, of the violence of late capitalism, each concentrated and, if for that briefest of instants, fully legible as such: a cumulative manifestation of a politics of separation and deferral.

In closing this account, I would like to explore the functions and implications of two singularly violent tropes – apocalypse and suicide, topographical polarities of violence – vis-à-vis the fundamental melancholia conjured in the millennial moment, and particularly as relates the problematics of agency, causality, and futurity in late capitalism brought to a head in this moment's promised yet undelivered apocalyptic violence. Here, we witness the abiding perpetual crisis of late capitalism as no less than that structured and demanded by the spectacle itself, the saturations and reorganizations of time, of space, and of the image, bringing their full totalitarian weight upon the subject, and also back upon itself, reaching an apocalyptic critical mass: in Agamben's reckoning,

> (t)he "becoming-image" of capital is nothing more than the commodity's last metamorphosis, in which exchange value has completely eclipsed use value and can now achieve the status of absolute and irresponsible sovereignty over life in its entirety, after having falsified the entire social production.[2]

The extremities borne by this late and "eventful" moment do little more than evidence what is always-already at stake in spectacular society, making particularly visible and to a heightened, even hyperbolic degree what has haunted late capitalism all along: that its requisite organizations of power, knowledge, and discourse have reached the fullest extent and limit of their power, that its violence is unlimited and nakedly celebrated for its own sake as the means to its fully-actualized ends of the total abstraction of value (aesthetic, economic, and philosophical, determining the very value of life itself as bare and political matter), and most crucially that for all its imaginary eternality all this might end in a spectacular crash, an inevitable collapse as the evermore frail matrices of containment and instrumentalization give way to the centripetal and centrifugal instabilities of a system reaching its material, conceptual, and strategically manageable limits.

Both within and against context, it should perhaps be of no surprise that even in the most relentlessly affirmative of commercial cinemas the themes of apocalypse, self-destruction, and suicidality under the entropic weight of the "eternal now" should come fully into the fore, in tension with the ecstatic sense of rapture and boundless futurity accompanying this moment in our history, and articulating *in extremis* the types of gestural and experiential modifications so prevalent, problematic, and now *evident* in millennial late-capitalism. In many ways, we end here precisely where we began: in the conflagrated terrain of aptitude, integrality and obsession that marks cinema's general affinity with the violent, an affinity laid even more bare in the culminated coda of late-capitalist experience – the suspended and wholly anticlimactic space of the millennial moment, imbricated but in tension with a melancholic structure that cannot see its own end, much less beyond it, yet is compelled to do so.

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[2] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 76.

TO ILL AFFECT
(OR, "WE'RE ALL MAD HERE!")

> *Between what I recognize and what I do not recognize there is myself.*
>
> André Breton

> *It is no longer the spleen or the vague yearnings of the fin-de-siècle soul. It is no longer nihilism either, which in some sense aims at normalizing everything through destruction, the passion of resentment (*ressentiment*). No, melancholia is the fundamental tonality of functional systems, of current systems of simulation, of programming and information. Melancholia is the inherent quality of the mode of the disappearance of meaning, of the mode of the volatilization of meaning in operational systems. And we are all melancholic.*[3]
>
> Jean Baudrillard
> *Simulacra and Simulation*

To enter this discussion, we might concern ourselves less with the "extremity" of this moment as a critical mass (and the like extremities of violence toward which the cinema of our time increasingly turns its obsessive gaze) than the affect that accompanies and defines it: a profoundly realized, but for this generally unrecognized, melancholia. This affect, which reveals itself in so many millennial films, is crucial to the concerns at hand here inasmuch as it is rooted in an internalized and self-directed violence, a sadistic impulse to undo the world coupled and bound up with the paralysis of anhedonic inhibition. Further, the ways in which this affect is articulated and taken up – both in the cinema and in theories of sacrificial and affective excess – speaks volumes to the degree to which this melancholia is perhaps as inescapable and ineluctable as the conditions that engendered it.

The classical definition of melancholia advanced by Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia" situates the condition, essentially, as a failure of the movement of narrative synthesis, of communication and expression, and of the ego's capacity to maintain its integrity in the face of and overpowering, objectless loss. As opposed to mourning, where a loss of whatever object or ideal is negotiated and overcome though a progressive and expressive series of psychic and material rituals that retain the object or ideal as a concrete and external site against which the ego may remain distinct, in melancholia the circuit is interrupted: the object and ego become indistinct, and the ego itself becomes the "target" for all the rage against this object. Indeed, the object itself disappears, becomes phantasmal; consequently, the ego has nothing but itself to blame, nothing but itself to rage against, and nothing outside itself to project these intensities upon: the ego replaces the object as a locus of aggression, taking itself as object. Melancholia, then, is characterized by a profound internalization of loss, of grief, and consequently of rage: all of the ambivalence toward the lost object that is negotiated in mourning (the depth of love for the object matched with an equal aggression toward it for its loss, for tearing away those pieces of the ego defined in its relation to it, and so forth) has nowhere to go; expression and communication fail, as does the possibility for a meaningful connection to anything outside the monastically self-flagellating ego (as Judith Butler is keen to note, "In melancholia, not only is the loss of an other or an ideal lost to consciousness, but the social world in which such a loss became possible is also lost"[4]). A netherworld or purgatory wherein the subject wanders like the living dead, melancholia is entropic rather than progressive, static rather than mobile, and every bit as much as its counterpart in mourning bound to a narrative and economic paradigm which it forecloses in its collapse, its crash. In its antieconomic extremity and counterproductivity, in its vicious internalization, and in its equally vicious spiral of despair and rage, melancholia is both a violence against the self (taken to its logical end, the entrenched self-abasement culminates in suicide) and a violence to all that informs the self (signification, expression, progress), hence its unsurprising coding as among the most profound of pathologies.

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[3] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 162.

While Butler traces the concomitance of subjectivation and melancholia in extraordinarily productive ways, for our present purposes perhaps the most cogent discussion of melancholia as both an intransigent affect and an historically-rooted cultural and discursive phenomenon emerges from Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, in which her primary intervention is to rescue the concept from its clinical abuse and ideological abasement in order to return it not only to its own pre-Freudian (if not fully pre-pathologized) history, but to history itself, as an abjectified but necessary part of its very movement and processes, and which under certain social and political circumstances manifests itself as a depressive zeitgeist. Early in this study, she notes that

> (t)he periods that witness the downfall of political and religious idols, periods of crisis, are particularly favorable to black moods. (...) (M)elancholia does assert itself in times of crisis; it is spoken of, establishes its archaeology, generates its

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[4] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 181.

> representations and its knowledge."[5]

We can immediately recognize the requisite conditions Kristeva enumerates in the multiple crises of legitimation carried with late capitalism and spectacular society; a brief enumeration of these correspondences on our part will suffice. Its symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia corresponds, respectively, to the crises of expression and flattening of affect delineated by Jameson and to the spectacular "inversion of our linguistic nature" described by Agamben. Its aetiology in inwardly-directed, objectless aggression and intransigent guilt is of a piece with that carried along with subjectivation and the "psychic violence of conscience"[6] it instills, as argued by Butler. And most importantly, as Kristeva herself acknowledges in her historio-cultural situation of melancholia, its thought has deeper roots than those Freudian tenets from which all theories of melancholia derive. Indeed, melancholia's history is bound up in that of Western philosophy itself, as an evidenced affect of the philosopher (the figure of the ascetic), as a continual point of return (the aporetic question of sadness and its exalted or denigrated value to the productivity of thought and expression), and even, following from these, as an inaugural condition of possibility (dating back to the Aristotelian humours and the sentiment that melancholia "is not a philosopher's disease but his very nature, his *ethos* ... [and when] counterbalanced by [ecstatic] genius is coextensive with man's anxiety in Being,"[7] a line she traces through Kierkegaard to Heidegger). By the terms advanced in Chapter One, this aporetic and obsessive centrality of melancholia to the philosophical enterprise places melancholia and violence in a conceptual proximity that all the more supplements their concomitance in the theory of the "disorder" itself.

But even if we may take these correspondences as read, the question that remains before us is how this melancholia is, and more is permitted to be, articulated in a time where all signs point and work to its *disavowal* – and indeed, to the ecstatic disavowal of crisis in general – and what form (or forms) its representation may effectively take. For despite these myriad and concerted disavowals – part and parcel with the clinical model of melancholia as comorbid with a preservative mania, and not least informed by the affirmative utopianism that is the defining psychopathology of commercial narrative cinema – millennial Hollywood cinema indeed evidences, articulates, and reveals a pervasive cultural melancholia. It reveals itself in figures, isolated and apart from the world that continually remains exterior to their actions: figments of and figures in perpetual crisis, nomadic monads that float through decay, alighting for brief moments before being swept again into the aleatory flux. These figures – notably overdetermined as the walking dead – have not only overpopulated the films of this moment, but have taken a variety of forms, as though species under the genus *homo melancholia*. *American Beauty*'s Lester Burns is an archetypal castrated and broken man, Bartleby with a home life even worse than the world of work, whose anhedonia is alleviated and dispelled first in illicit and excessive pleasures (from shrugging off the bonds of bourgeois labor to monastic and onanistic indulgence in narcotics and sexual fantasy) and finally in death (an absolute and irrevocable freedom). In *Fight Club*, the nameless Narrator who finds a stability of self in images and seeks a mythic regeneration through violence, is likewise anhedonic, an insomniac whose only means to pleasure is pain – first of others, then his own. *Bringing out the Dead*'s Frank Pierce yet again provides a figure who drifts, as though a ghost, through a city of ghosts, the soon-to-die who at least have that pleasure and promise of escape; he is conscripted in the service of their grief, damned to continue as their failed savior and witness. And Leonard Shelby, the amnesiac protagonist of Christopher Nolan's mainstream breakthrough *Memento* (2001) is perhaps the most pungent figure of the postmodern condition, inhabiting a literalized "eternal now" as a Jamesonian "series of perpetual presents" brought on by a cataclysmic trauma to mind and memory, and desperately reliant on the Benjaminian "dry rebuses"[8] of allegorical text inscribed in his flesh as a map to truth and release through violence that can never be realized, much less remembered. While vested with a certain didacticism, these are nonetheless meaningfully articulated figures of concentrated and unremitting suffering and conscription, even resignation, to the violences of contemporary experience, and given melancholia's proper relation to narrative, finding their force of meaning within and not despite the allegorizing forces that motivate them: as Kristeva notes, "(s)uffering unfurls in a microcosm through the reverberation of characters. They are articulated as doubles, as in mirrors that magnify their melancholia to the point of violence and delirium."[9]

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[5] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 8.

[6] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 185.

[7] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 7. Brackets mine.

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[8] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 176. The full citation, which opens on the here-elided role of allegoricity to the work of mourning, is as follows: "In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune. (...) The false appearance of totality is extinguished. For the *eidos* disappears, the simile ceases to exist, and the cosmos it contained shrivels up. The dry rebuses which remain contain an insight, which is still available to the confused investigator."

This suffered suffering further (and all the more explicitly, lest the message be lost amidst the images) reveals itself in dialogue, in voices disconnected, the exteriority of the interior monologue, in reflections on suspension, indeterminacy, emptiness, and the saturation of anguish wretched and resigned:

> From *Bringing Out the Dead*:
> *You cannot be in the presence of the newly-dead without feeling it. I know that. What haunted me now was more savage. Spirits born half-finished: homicides, suicides, overdoses...accusing me of being there, witnessing a humiliation which they could never forgive.*
> *Five or six in the morning is always the worst time for me – just before dawn, just when you've been lulled into thinking, it might be safe to close your eyes for one minute.*
> *I was a grief mop.*
>
> From *Fight Club:*
> *This is your life, and it's ending one minute at a time.*
>
> And from *American Beauty*:
> *This is my life. I'm forty-two years old. In less than a year, I'll be dead. Of course, I don't know that yet. And in a way, I'm dead already.*

The articulations of this pervasive melancholia by no means end here. It reveals itself in fearful, (post-)apocalyptic spaces, in metonymically nameless, eternally rotting cities (*Se7en*, *Fight Club*, *Kalifornia*, *Bringing Out the Dead*, etc.), in stark, deserted wastelands held in uncomfortably long shots (*Se7en* again, and *Three Kings*), more tellingly in picture-perfect façades with entropic insides (*L.A. Confidential*, *American Beauty*), and in the neo-baroque conception of time-as-timelessness and ruination that those spaces inform and evoke. Indeed, it seemingly reveals itself *everywhere* in the cinema of this moment, suffusing every frame, every line of dialogue, the totality of diegetic space.

But beyond this evidence – and there is so much more than is related here[10] – how can we consider this particular moment, this moment *itself*, as truly – that is, "properly" – melancholic, beyond the articulations and figurations of melancholia in general and the subsequent pitfalls of transposition from individuated diagnosis to cultural condition or discursive logic? Given Kristeva's explicit claim that "(a) *written* melancholia surely has little in common with the institutionalized stupor that bears the same name,"[11] can the expressive and even political potentials of the condition for which she argues be translated to a culture of the image, which tendentially eschews these kinds of potentials and that indeed has foreclosed their expressive qualities as part and parcel with its rise to dominance and its coordinate alienations from our "linguistic essence" that Agamben has so dolefully noted? And more to the point: how, specifically, do these questions come to bear on the cinema and violence? Two concerns, then, arise here: first, the degree to which melancholia marks the postmodern in general and the millennial moment in particular; and second, the means by and ends to which those most properly melancholic drives – drives, ultimately, to violence – are properly articulated by the cinema, itself also arguably in decline and decay.

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[9] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 257.

[10] Or *could be* fully related here; this phenomenon extends beyond the cinema, of course, in literature, in television, in music, and even in the sudden popularity of "extreme sports" (indeed, "extreme *anything*").

To begin, then, we might turn to the most fundamental question at hand: in what ways *is* melancholia the affect – and even *logic* – of late capitalism? As already suggested, this question is both more and less difficult than meets the eye. On the face of things and given the bulk of public and academic discourse on the subject of postmodernism, this depressive ascription minimally seems counter-intuitive. Has any era – aesthetically, economically, even socially – matched the spectacularly punch-drunk giddiness of the (specifically American) postmodern? A soaring national/first-world economy, the popular media's embrace of challenging and even disruptive aesthetic play, transgressions of social boundaries and sanctioned desires, and the providential returns and privileges of a market that promised the dreams of Horatio Alger – even of a "classless society" – without the work...all bodes well for such considerations of the postmodern as playful, amatory, even progressive (however problematically "empty" these considerations may be). But the spectre of depression haunts the historically calcified and ecstatically overcoded millennial moment as much as it does late capitalism or postmodernism in general – but here, in its full lateness and on the event horizon of an ostensibly propitious moment saturated with sanguine expectation, to an amplified and more problematic degree. It is this other side – that sense of, *and desire for*, an impending apocalypse that is nonetheless always deferred despite the immanent logic that it cannot be, the crash that cannot but could come at any moment, the point at which empty laughter turns to fulsome tears – that colors by pentimento the economic, aesthetic and affective "highs" of millennial late capitalism.

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[11] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 8-9. Emphases mine.

At this point, then, I would like to defer the discussion of this melancholia in itself and consider first Kristeva's own conception, even celebration, of this *ludic façade* of the postmodern, a curious and deceptively straightforward fragment of her book to which she devotes only its final passage. She states that, in reaction to the crisis of meaning in postmodernity,

> (t)he postmodern is closer to the human comedy than to the abyssal discontent. (...) The desire for comedy shows up today to conceal – without for that matter being unaware of it – the concern for such a truth without tragedy, melancholia without purgatory.[12]

In short, what Kristeva identifies here is a desire for a return to pre-Christian (and -proto-capitalist) modalities of apprehending this affect (if not all affect, inasmuch as the excess of emotion as a presymbolic marker of the "uncivilized" is increasingly verboten in the modern Western sphere) in general: a *utopian gesture* predicated, crucially, on a nostalgic return through and as a celebration of excess and a freedom from the debts imposed by our mode of existence. And in this, Kristeva suggests is that the excessive ecstasy of aesthetic and cultural "postmodern play" is a self-conscious mechanism of self-preservation, schizophrenically coupled with the depressive unconscious brought to light: an attempt at "overcoming" (or at least plausibly denying) the traumas of crisis and melancholia, while at the same time (and for the same reasons) even celebrating the sadness motivating these maneuvers.

This acknowledgement of the depressive, however furtive it may be, seems to stand as potentially productive and disruptive to the dominant order in the non-pathological and -pathologized embrace of sadness, even melancholia, for the fecundity, profundity, and destructively revelatory character of the discourse it produces. Not unlike Lyotard's and Deleuze's respective accounts of the affective power of the acinematic or the Figure and certainly extending the logic expressed in her pensive celebration of abjection, Kristeva situates melancholia and its recuperative welcome as an intractably resistant gesture against codified economies and ends of desire, an expressive counterviolence cutting through and ricocheting within those codifications and their always-active pressures, turning them against themselves. As she says in her exaltation of excessive and nominally violent moods, "moods are *inscriptions*, energy disruptions, and not simply raw energies. They lead us toward a modality of signifiance that, on the threshold of bioenergetic stability, insures the preconditions for or manifests the disintegration of the imaginary and symbolic;"[13] and further claims that "a diversification of moods, variety in sadness, refinement in sorrow or mourning are the imprint of a humankind that is surely not triumphant *but subtle, ready to fight, and creative...*"[14]

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[12] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 258-259.

Yet for all of her own ecstasy in reclaiming melancholia both within and as a politics of affective and expressive play permitted by the present moment, Kristeva's conception of postmodernity as "a new amatory world com(ing) to the surface within the eternal return of historical and intellectual cycles"[15] is both telling and problematic, at once symptomatic of the preservative and productive mechanism she describes and, more deleteriously, of the thought and character of the era itself. For Kristeva, it seems, history[16] – or at least the consciousness *of* history – oscillates slowly between dialectical polarities: "Following the winter of discontent comes the artifice of seeming; following the whiteness of boredom, the heartrending distraction of parody. And vice versa."[17] Here, the *Geist* wears a singular mask; it is not so much the Janus-face of the aporetic coexistence of incommensurates as a diurnal settlement on the visage of comedy while facing that of tragedy beside it, a dramaturgical passage from day into night and back again, its logical, predictable course and the subjects caught up in it simply following circadian rhythms, a reassuring and essentially mimetic formulation of a natural, economic order of things.

To return the first problematic her account raises – that of recognizing the outward face of the ludic postmodern and the logic it entails, though not yet to fully problematize accepting or valorizing its excesses – this formulation indeed informs the notion of an inevitable undercurrent of melancholia beneath the cheerful façade, a lingering sadness in direct proportion to the ecstatic playfulness which seeks to efface (if not *remedy*) the former.

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[13] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 22.

[14] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 22. Ellipses hers, emphases mine.

[15] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 259.

[16] I use this term loosely as it applies to Kristeva's arguments, as she too is fast and loose with the implications (and responsibilities) of "historical and intellectual cycles" as such. While her notation of such a Nietzschean return is a well-noted gesture towards the complex vicissitudes of the tides of history and repetition, the way in which this notation is followed through – indeed, inasmuch as it is hardly followed through at all – in her considerations works to precisely the opposite effect: in the final analysis, this melancholic impulse is less a transhistorical phenomenon than an inevitable, ahistorical, or dehistoricized, phenomenon, much of the same logic as the celebration of Bataille's sacrifice and excess critiqued below.

[17] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 259.

In fact, the very "open hiddenness" of this depressive undercurrent in Kristeva's own formulation of the postmodern, perhaps her most pronounced utopian gesture in this book, is *itself* symptomatic of the melancholic condition: as Freud observes in "Mourning and Melancholia," "(t)he most remarkable peculiarity of melancholia…is the tendency it displays to turn into mania accompanied by a completely opposite symptomatology."[18] Rooted in a common aetiology, this oscillation between and commingling of affective extremes is not without an economicity and necessity: the more productively-coded affect counterbalances and drives its other underground. Kristeva's transposition of the inextricable binding between melancholia and its conceptually attendant, even necessary mania found in Freud's original account onto a larger stage is at once an affirmation of that conditioned affective economicity and an exploitation of the conditions of the late-capitalist vortexes that permit and require shifting from the molar to the molecular with equivalence, from totality to the monads that contain and express the world entire.

So while Kristeva's account of history qua history is undoubtedly problematic, from *within* the experience of melancholia – that is, as a rendering of historical consciousness *from a melancholic point of view* – her account takes on a more lucid and amenable quality. The endless cyclicality, the predictable ebb and flow of late capitalism's drifting mari-time, is the temporal-historical marker of the melancholiac: every day like the last, each day just another scar tallied on the depressive soul, with the end vigilantly anticipated but nowhere in sight. This is an *insomniac space*, a messianic twilight between the dead of night and light of day, inhabited by a subjectivity that has lost all sense of time and space – "Now, where was I?" asks *Memento*'s poor Leonard, each word critical and irreducible – and moreover all sense of purpose or ability to attain purpose, Pozzos and Luckys populating the navel of this naval field, "nothing to be done," ever vigilant and forever waiting.

A consequence of the spectacle's abstractions, deferrals, and separations, the figure of the insomniac encompasses a state of anxious, vigilant indeterminacy in the failure or suspension of the rhythms of the ludic day and the melancholiac night that organizes Kristeva's image of history, and is in many ways the crux of the *Fight Club*'s evocative commentary on melancholia in relation to the power of the spectacle. Afflicted with chronic and untreatable insomnia, the film's Narrator (Edward Norton) lives in a state precariously balanced between sleep and waking, sleep-walking while wide awake: he exists suspended on the event horizon between the gravitational pull of two singular but dialectically interdependent forces (light and darkness, consciousness and unconsciousness), waiting in vain to decisively settle into either. It should be of no surprise that early in the film, insomnia is described and depicted as a distanced, simulacral state of consciousness: "With insomnia, nothing's real; everything's far away; everything's a copy of a copy of a copy," the Narrator relates in an interior monologue delivered from behind a running photocopier, the repetitive passes of the machine's phosphorescent arm blinding the eyes, light and machine marking consistently meted blank moments in time. And it is in this sequence we receive our first glimpse of the Narrator's antagonistic and imagistic ego-ideal Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) in an image that is nearly subliminal. As the "below" of experience but "above" non-experience, or death, in this subjective image subliminality is the perceptual modality that complements the insomniac experience of intermediacy, a stasis of experientiality amid the ecstasis of a hyperspeed and hyperreal world, images unspooling on their own accord. From this scene forward, the spectator all the more restlessly scans the scenic space, eyes wide open for any subsequent subliminal cues for the meaning behind it all: the film-space as an insomniac, messianic space that demands constant, wakeful vigilance lest the decisive moment slip by. Furthermore, if we recall Jameson's theorization of late capitalism's endless procession of perpetual presents and Debord's claim that "(c)onsumable pseudo-cyclical time is the time of the spectacle: in the narrow sense, as the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and, in the broadest sense, as the image of the consumption of time,"[19] the "pseudo-cyclicality" that made Kristeva's historicity of melancholia appear to be so problematic is at the same time much easier to comprehend as the comprehensive and constitutive condition for the correlation of this affect with this mode of existence: the time of the spectacle, the time of consumption without end, is the time of melancholia, their logics are commensurate and coordinated – it is the time of the eternal now, it is no time and all the time in the world at the same time.

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[18] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 174.

It is thus that in the full bloom of the integrated spectacle, as Baudrillard unequivocally remarks, the affect that arises is *inevitably*, even *inescapably* melancholic. Indeed, for Baudrillard the diagnosis is far more dire than Kristeva's or even Debord's: the late-capitalist moment, coincident with the endpoint in the "precession of simulacra," represents a point of wholesale cultural inertia, the gaping maw of the Nietzschean abyss from which there is no escape, no possibility of lines of flight that are capable of resisting its gravity and its stain. This formulation posits the inescapable implosive and apocalyptic pull of a semiotic black hole, a point of *singularity* where culture – in every conceivable sense – teeters on the lip of the event horizon, where time itself is arrested. Such is this force of irresistible and instantaneous disappearance that even nihilism and its gestures can neither comprehend nor counteraffect: rather, it is "melancholia that is becoming our fundamental passion."[20] He finds in figures like Adorno and Benjamin, in the very adherence to (or, in Jameson's consideration, *persistence of*) the dialectic, an abiding and equally singularizing nostalgia, a yearning for an escape into a system that still allows, instead of an exponentially concentrated totality, that room for mediation, for dialogue and thought "without velleity or violence."[21] For Baudrillard, in a state of total medi(tiz)ation this mediatory space is no longer a valid category, much less an available option for any recuperative strategy. As such, it is this melancholic yearning, so inescapable in itself, that characterizes for Baudrillard the late capitalist condition: the impossible desire to return to a place with the possibility and means of negotiation; within this singularity, nihilism and utopianism – not unlike mania and melancholia – collapse into one.

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[19] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 112.

The problematically univocal quality of his neo-Bataillean nihilism notwithstanding, the rationale behind his theorization is intriguing and instructive. For what Baudrillard posits here, in fact, is the *spectral disappearance* of the dialectic, of the modern subject, *of meaning itself.* Not the "end" of these, nor their "death," but rather their sudden and inexplicable *absence*, sucked in a flash into the totality of a saturated system. Struck even more deeply by this disappearance than by death, the subject is rendered helpless, dumbfounded, and incapable of any expression to articulate, contest, or revive the object of this disappearing act. The "logical" response to such an inexplicable loss would, it follows, be truly melancholic: the project of mourning here becomes impossible, for what are we to mourn? Where is the corpse to be interred, the scene of the crime to be revisited, the semiological and psychical gravestones on which to pay remembrance; and moreover, *when* and *how* did it happen? It is precisely in these last – the impossibility of remembrance *because of the impossibility of memory itself* – that leads, inexorably, to an inescapable melancholia. Radical absence through radical absention: not even an after-image remains; this is the Baudrillardian axiom.

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[20] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 162.
[21] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247.

But of course there is a trace in memory of meaning, but as inaccessible and inscrutable as a degraded hieroglyph: something *was* here, and now it's gone...only we cannot remember – at least not for ourselves – precisely *what.* In other terms, the melancholiac spectacular subject wanders, like *Fight Club*'s nameless Narrator and *Bringing Out the Dead's* Frank Pierce, through a reified, entropic world as an insomniac nomad, in search of an object that, by virtue of the violence of this terrible singularity, has always-already been forgotten. In this, the problems that arise in a consideration of the pre-traumatic subject, the origin of trauma and its ensuing melancholia in Kristeva's psychoanalytic account, when cast in the black light of the singularity of the simulacral eternal now, gain an arguably more lucid reconciliation: indeed, the pre-traumatic self, the subject who has been unscarred by the wholesale alienating and reifying functions of late capitalism, has too always-already been forgotten precisely by this latter's movement of disappearance and forgetting, and any means of correction or recognition will always-already be by the simulacrum's own terms.

Yet those traces (or scars, perhaps) of meaning and memory beyond these terms persist, if only to be revealed and recognized in the most fleeting and mysterious moments, if only to be incompletely recognized in fragments and figures like those described above, if only in the cinema "remembering" us *for* us. Indeed, and with full acknowledgement of the singularly totalitarian character of late capitalism and the integrated spectacle, is there not an alternative to this conception, or if not, at least a mediation to consider the *potential* for a critical and disruptive (if not necessarily "amatory") function within this cinema? And could such a function only be fulfilled by an image-regime that disrupts or decenters the very concept of the "amatory" as such, defusing its affirmative and mystified character, pushing these considerations into terrain that more properly accounts for the politicality of these desires and the images that appease them?

Those acinematic and revelatory "chaos-images" discussed in the previous chapter certainly signal a potential for (if not the inevitability of) the most productively violent decompositions of the cinematic image, even of the stability of the frame itself, in ways that mirror both Lyotard's simulacral reframings and the postmodern subjectivity (the simulacra of melancholia) these films represent. The chaos-image that punctuates and disrupts *Fight Club*, in relation to its sustained and intensive expression of this bifurcated millennial affect, reveals and releases a tension between stasis and ec-stasis, those polarities of "immobility and excessive movement" that Lyotard isolates as the alpha and omega of cinema's representational and political capacities; in short, an *apocalyptic* image that in revelation destroys what it reveals. The concomitance of revelation and negation in such an image, its productivity and its nihilism, not only shores up the indeterminate terrain the cinematic image may tread despite the forces that direct its function, but also provides a promising if provisional and tenuous bridge between the disparately despairing perspectives presented by Kristeva and Baudrillard: answering, if incompletely, to our earlier question of whether the image may express the melancholia for which it is in large part responsible, the tentative conclusion would seem to be in the affirmative, if not as a guaranteed outcome. But for the moment, I want to leave this chord suspended as an overtone, in order to discuss the both the quality and kind of violence that arises from melancholia and this cinema's complicity with its compulsive movement toward annihilation and absence.

FINAL "SOLUTIONS":
MELANCHOLIA AND THE WILL TO VIOLENCE

(A)t the limit of the two daylights which oppose exterior reality to the subjectivism of the passage, like a man holding back at the edge of his abysses, equally attracted by the current of objects and by the tornadoes of himself, in this strange zone where everything is distraction of attention and of inattention, let us halt a moment to experience this vertigo.[22]

Louis Aragon
Le Paysan de Paris

At this point, we are in a better and more urgent position to redirect this discussion back to the second concern Kristeva's account of melancholia raises: the destructive productivity of melancholia's drives. As she notes of this inhering drive to violence,

> (a)ccording to classic psychoanalytic theory (Abraham, Freud, and Melanie Klein), depression, like mourning, conceals an aggressiveness toward the lost object, thus revealing the ambivalence of the depressed person with respect to the object of mourning. 'I love that object,' is what that person seems to say about the lost object, 'but even moreso I hate it; because I love it, and in order not to lose it, I imbed it in myself; but because I hate it, that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad, I am non-existent, I shall kill myself.' The complaint against oneself would therefore be a complaint against another, and putting oneself to death but a tragic disguise for massacring an other.[23]

Within these folds of loathing, displacement and transposition that ultimately (and in a characteristically baroque manner) fold inward to the death of the subject, we can recognize an internalized relation to violence that is a reversal, an inversion turning on precisely what the violent imaginary demands: the external(ized) locus of violence, circumscribed within the bounds of an abjectified other, against which violence must be exercised and exorcized. In this, we might complement our previous discussions by suggesting another way in which representations of violence function in accommodating the subject to the conditions of late capitalism: by providing an external locus into which the melancholiac's inwardly-directed aggressions, fears, and loathing may be projected and displaced, a means by which the subject can translate the aporetic self-loathing inculcated by its mode of existence into a more productive "massacre of the other" as a sacrifice in the name of the preservation and affirmation of the self and social body as such. But at the same time, one of melancholia's defining traits – and certainly the most important for this discussion – is its objectless aggression, for which even such externalizing gestures cannot compensate. As either an individual pathology or, as we are suggesting here, a generalized affect precipitated by our mode of production and its spectacularized, meaning-less mode of existence, melancholia's pure interiorization of violent intent may only find its only reconciliation by directing that aggression either radically within (as in suicide) or, in apocalyptic ideation, fantastically without, on the scale of the whole world (as aggression against the unlocalizable matrix of media and mediatized relations that constitute the integrated spectacle and the subject therein). We therefore need to examine more carefully how the cinema of this moment is important to both the mediation and perpetuation of this millennial affect.

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[22] Cited with this translation in Caws, *A Metapoetics of the Passage*, frontispiece.

[23] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 11.

To be sure, in the pervasive suicidality and apocalyptic nihilism that structures so many millennial films, the cinema provides us with remedies for even this situation, indeed even a temporary respite from this terrible objectless aggression and the self-blame of melancholia itself, by providing figures of suffering to substitute for our own, of threatening forces responsible for current and future oppression or, absent even these, images of the end of days: apocalypse as the utopian negation of negation, the violence to end all violence, a locus in and as the world itself against which the late capitalist subject can take its revenge, even exorcise its melancholiac aggression. The excessive gestures at stake here, the inward or outward massacres of the oppressive forces deemed responsible for this condition, are every bit as mythically sacrificial as that of the externalized other as a figure of displacement: in the case of the suicide, a sacrifice of the other through and as the self-alienated self, and at the "opposite" end, the willingness and desire to sacrifice the world entire in apocalypse to preserve, even in its destruction, the mythic integrity and sacred character of the individual. What, then, are we then to make of the potentials of the self-destructive yet Self-preservative impulses that arise from this inconsolable state, this desire for apocalypse, when these gestures in this moment so clearly point to not just an escape or transformation, but a mythic, even regenerative destruction and regression?

It is at this point that the *political character* and valorization of this excess and the sacrificial drive that accompanies and complements it needs to be examined, and especially given the still-problematic historicization of melancholia-as-cultural-logic we (and Kristeva) continue to inhabit. As Christopher Sharrett notes so well in "Sacrificial Violence and Postmodern Ideology," these drives to symbolic sacrifice and Bataillean excess, on the part of both media and those theories that celebrate the productivity of these mythic and ludic modes in the late-capitalist landscape, are particularly troublesome vis-à-vis both the conditions of late capitalism itself and the politics of such an intervention in the first place. Essentially, for Sharrett, the embrace of these modes (in theory or representation) entails a fundamental depoliticization of the practices themselves, taking instead as sufficient the more outward (and more superficial) functions they serve vis-à-vis a similarly depoliticized – and just as crucially, dehistoricized – rendering of more classical modes of thought: modes that even in their proper historical contexts (say, a pre-Cold War and pre-Spectacular geopolitical and geocapitalist cosmology) may have been politically problematic, but are even moreso in our current situation. At fundamental issue here are the ways in which "(t)he bad faith of ludic culture … is the idealist status given to sacrificial ideology itself."[24] Sharrett's primary target here is Bataille, whose own "bad faith" in the potentialities of whatever mode of sadomasochistic sacrificial excess can also be witnessed (though certainly not as explicitly) in Kristeva's celebration of melancholia and its discourse, the divinity and transcendent character of suffering itself.

Given the problematic character of celebrating impulses to excess either for their own sake or as a means to a politicized end, Kristeva's ascription of such potentialities to the ludic postmodern as a *reaction to* a pervasive melancholia in our time again becomes particularly difficult to situate. To an extent, she does seem to recognize the impossibility of this situation; she notes, "(t)he point now is to see in 'the malady of grief' only one moment of the *narrative synthesis* capable of sweeping along in its complex whirlwind philosophical meditations as well as erotic protections or entertaining pleasures."[25] The "only one moment" here is as crucial as it is troublesome: on the one hand, in belying the aleatory character of this intractable "malady," it again seems to be an implicit recognition of the concerted hiddenness of melancholia in the postmodern, but on the other hand, it also seems a like (and likewise narratological and narrativizing) maneuver to sweep it away: "this too has passed, or soon will." And as Kristeva makes clear, what has "passed it away" – even if only superficially – is precisely that ludic or excessive impulse that the postmodern presents. In this, then, it is not so much that Kristeva's postmodern musings are incorrect, just incomplete. In fact, even her most mythic turn (the cycles of history, the mimetic impulse) speaks quite directly to precisely what's at stake in this moment: cyclicality as a condition of reified time, space, and consciousness, schizophrenically at odds with the linearity of "narrative synthesis" as a straight vector which traverses and flattens the cyclicality into a corrective image of teleological futurity, "squaring the circle," as it were. At the same time, it is not so much the case that Kristeva (or, for that matter, even Bataille and Lyotard) fails to accurately locate a locus of potentiality in these disruptive, sacrificial, and ultimately violent gestures; rather, it is the way in which these means and ends – like the melancholic logic that necessitates and desperately cries out for them – are always-already taken up by and of a part with the structure they contend with, their violence always-already foreclosed.

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[24] Sharrett, "Sacrificial Violence and Postmodern Ideology," 422.

[25] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 258.

Still, Sharrett finds himself in agreement with Kristeva and Baudrillard's overarching identification of the fundamental crises of meaning, of experience, and of their potential means of recovery as melancholic triggers. As he notes,

> (t)he sacrificial crisis of postmodern experience is … grounded in the culture of simulation, recalling that the crisis is indicative of the collapse of language, the consensus from which it originates and the rituals it generates. The culture of the simulacra is not one of 'copies' but one of a profound absence marking the demise of lived experience as the will-to-meaning fades with the exposure of myth. The commodity form, the thing desired, is in its most precarious situation in this circumstance, given its evanescence in the realm of simulation.[26]

This precariousness, perhaps, evidences itself most clearly in another of *Fight Club*'s revelatory images, where the Narrator traverses the static space of his condominium-qua-advertisement (the space of the advertisement clearly defining the space of life and means of expression): his very identity – and he is well aware of it, as the affectless voiceover narration makes clear – is found in the aleatory contingencies of fashion and fetishized commodities (simulacra of taste and self-expression alike and as one, they speak him for him). At the same time, the consciousness of this terrible trade-off, and the resignation to it, figure and speak with marked acuity to both the melancholia inherent in such a mode of existence and a hostility toward it: when his alter-ego reveals that he himself laid waste to these privileged objects in a symbolic suicide, we find ourselves again in the realm of overwhelming objects that Freud and Kristeva describe; when he attempts a more literal suicide to rid himself of his no-longer-external imaginary (more, cinematic) alter-ego that also threatens to overwhelm him, the "overcoming" is as mythically complete as he imagines himself to be through it.

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[26] Sharrett, "Sacrificial Violence and Postmodern Ideology," 429.

What we might observe from those tropes of self-destruction and suicidality, then, is more than the simple succumbing to overwhelming despair, and indeed more than a fashionable nihilism or reified and romanticized suffering (the suicide chic of a Prozac Nation). What becomes apparent in these nihilistic gestures that work to affront or disrupt the internalized, damaging conditions of a reified world is a *political impetus*, or at least the image thereof: here, these gestures are nothing if not considered as the ultimate acts of bad faith – and ultimately violence – against that system which created the conditions of despair in the first place. In this sense, the self-destructive or suicidal gesture becomes the ultimate – and crucially, ultimately and irreducibly *private* – form of the strike, denying in full any future labor and voiding the "imaginary warrant of human capital"[27] imposed upon it; it becomes the radical disavowal of the affirmative, teleological mythos of perseverative bourgeois consumer culture and capitalism; it becomes the ultimate and decisive assertion of agency in the face of its equally ultimate and decisive impossibility. And the suicide, in committing a crime that cannot be punished and thus exceeds juridicial power over life (politicized or otherwise), in asserting a sovereign will and right over its own bare life and existence, is the ultimate "bad subject" that makes the limit of power over life visible: as Agamben notes,

> (l)ike the sovereign decision in the state of exception, the sovereignty of the living being over himself takes the form of a threshold of indiscernibility between interiority and exteriority, which the juridicial order can therefore neither exclude not include, neither forbid nor permit: 'The juridicial order,' Binding writes, 'tolerates the act despite the actual consequences that it must itself suffer on account of it. It does not claim to have the power to forbid it.'[28]

But at the same time, in parallel with the mythic double-bind that Sharrett has reminded us of, this also entails a fundamental bourgeois hubris – indeed, the world will, and does, go on without the dead – and returns as well to an implicit acknowledgement of the rules of the game: even as a politicized gesture, the suicide folds its hand to its very construction as human capital in its (self-)immolation, taking the bourgeois ethos for granted and reinscribing its terms in taking it *as* the locus and target of its aggression and protestation. Moreover, the reinterpellation of dead forms for affirmative or progressive ends – the human dead not excluded – is so integrally a part of the political-spectacular machinery of late capitalism, a machinery that still includes and is indebted to the cinema, that even after escape into whatever lies "beyond the frame," the monumental reminders – the grave, the pictures, the possessions – will linger, as spectral and material afterimages, for those "good subjects" to cluck their tongues at the pathological senselessness of the act and wonder why ("she should have done more to help herself," "he had so much to live for," "what a *waste*"). Indeed, Kristeva notes this terrible bind well:

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[27] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 78.

[28] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 136-137.

> Today's milestone is human madness. Politics is part of it, particularly in its lethal outbursts. Politics is not, as it was for Hannah Arendt, the field where human freedom is unfurled. The modern world, the world of world wars, the Third World, the underground world of death that acts upon us, do not have the civilized splendor of the Greek city state. The modern political domain is massively, in totalitarian fashion, social, leveling, exhausting. Hence madness is a space of antisocial, apolitical, and paradoxically free individuation. Confronting it, political events, outrageous and monstrous as they might be – the Nazi invasion, the atomic explosion – are assimilated to the extent of being measured only by the human suffering they cause. (...) In the view of an ethic and an aesthetic concerned with suffering, the mocked private domain gains a solemn dignity that depreciates the public domain while allocating to history the imposing responsibility for having triggered the malady of death. As a result, public life becomes seriously severed from reality whereas private life, on the other hand, is emphasized to the point of filling the whole of the real and invalidating any other concern. The new world, necessarily political, is unreal. We are living in the reality of a new suffering world.[29]

With the ultimate individual gesture of melancholia irrevocably tainted, taken up in thought and deed by that very system that it seeks to do violence to in escape, the nihilistic daydreams of this moment are reinflected on a more outward and extreme scale: in apocalyptic images and fantasies, the expression for which, as Kristeva also suggests, film is particularly, if problematically, adept.

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[29] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 235.

If it is still possible to speak of 'nothing' when attempting to chart the minute meanderings of psychic grief and death, are we still in the presence of nothing when confronting the gas chambers, the atomic bomb and the gulag? Neither the spectacular aspect of death's eruption in the universe of the Second World War, not the falling apart of conscious identity and rational behavior ending in institutional aspects of psychosis, often equally spectacular, are at stake. What those monstrous and painful sights do damage to are our systems of perception and representation. As if overtaxed or destroyed by too powerful a breaker, our symbolic means find themselves hollowed out, nearly wiped out, paralyzed. On the edge of silence the word 'nothing' emerges, a discreet defense in the face of so much disorder, both internal and external, incommensurable. Never has a cataclysm been more apocalyptically outrageous; never has its representation been assumed by so few symbolic means.[30]

Julia Kristeva
Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia

Today's nihilism is one of transparency, and it is in some sense more radical, more crucial than in its prior and historical forms, because this transparency, this irresolution is indissolubly that of the system, and that of all the theory that still pretends to analyze it. [...] The universe, and all of us, have entered to live into simulation, into the malefic, not even malefic, indifferent, sphere of deterrence: in a bizarre fashion, nihilism has been entirely realized no longer in destruction, but through simulation and deterrence. From the active, violent phantasm, from the phantasm of the myth and the stage that it also was, historically, it has passed into the transparent, falsely transparent, operation of things. What then remains of a possible nihilism in theory? What new scene can unfold, where nothing and death could be replayed as a challenge, *as a stake?*[31]

Jean Baudrillard
Simulacra and Simulation

In the face of such an extreme crisis of action, such an extreme subjection to despair and violence working in tandem, the thought *of* that crisis is far too much to bear, let alone to comprehend: against the weight of such emptiness, against this apocalyptic violence and chaos, words and action simply fail. What Kristeva reveals in the above passage is a problem familiar to "speaking of violence" in general, and amplified in the face or thought of a total and absolutely definitive violence: the impossibility of speech, of speaking *of* the apocalypse (the inexpressible, the beyond-language that evades the symbolic) while continually remanded to and confronted with the present traces of its perpetual aftermath. The thing, beyond the thought of the thing, is truly *monstrous* – and in a pure sense that Kristeva is keen to remind us:

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[30] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 223.

[31] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 159. Emphases his.

> A new rhetoric of the apocalypse (etymologically, *apocalypso* means de-monstration, dis-covering through sight, and contrasts with *aletheia*, the philosophical disclosure of truth) seemed necessary for a vision of this nevertheless monstrous nothing to emerge – a monstrosity that blinds and compels one to be silent. Such a new apocalyptic rhetoric was carried out in two seemingly opposite, extreme fashions that complement each other: a wealth of images and a holding back of words.[32]

She continues, noting herself the inhering (even singular) aptitude for the cinema to not only enact this rhetoric, but to potentially bring it into its fullest fruition:

> (T)he art of imagery excels in the raw display of monstrosity. Films remain the supreme art of the apocalypse, no matter what the refinements, because the image has such an ability to 'have us walk into fear,' as Augustine had already seen.[33]

In sum, the cinema holds for Kristeva as much as for Kracauer the singular potential for *revelation* in both its secular and divine senses, a means by which future and current apocalypses can be apprehended and articulated on their own visibly violent terms. For Kristeva, any *linguistic* discourse (literary or philosophical) that attempts to apprehend melancholia and apocalypse is doomed to fail in awkwardness and as shameful evidence of this insufficiency; it is itself, in essence and as a gesture, always-already melancholic. Only the image can comprehend or express this unspeakable, *in-vu, non-dit* (as Jameson says), because rhetoric, language and discourse itself are broken tokens insufficient for the task and doomed to fail; indeed, as I have argued throughout this study, violence in general, and especially in its most traumatic manifestations, presents an opacity to description and thus inexorably finds itself in the domain of the image, of re/presentation. While Kristeva's expressive irruptions of language in poetic discourse seem to be an attempt (though again one apparently resigned to failure) in this direction, even her philosophical-poetics as regards the impossible description of such images – specifically those of Resnais, her primary cinematic referent – shore up precisely the degree to which any such translation is always insufficient if not impossible.

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[32] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 224.

[33] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 224. Kristeva's own reference here is particularly resonant with the above discussion of cinema's affirmo-political functions in maintaining a mediated sacrificial economy of displacement: "Even though man worries to no avail, nevertheless he proceeds within the image" (Augustine, "Images," *On the Trinity*, XIV, IV, 6). In other words, the figure of suffering displaces, perhaps, ones own suffering onto an external site, one on and through which the path to overcoming that suffering can be witnessed, bearing the burden of despair if for only a brief time.

As Kristeva's discussion of the apocalyptic image and the conditions surrounding it are in many ways precisely the same as those Deleuze maps out vis-à-vis the time-image, it is of little surprise that this insufficiency of translation is also the same bind of which Deleuze's sublimely poetic conceptualisms risk running afoul, particularly in *Cinema II*: a book of pure translation from image to text, without the initial referent (image) at hand, as evidence and admission of this impossibility, at once allows him to speak of cinema's philosophical impetus in the apocalyptic/revelatory potentials of the time-image, and also, inevitably, dilutes them in their absence (though no more, perhaps, than in their presence: the image must be seen, but cannot be meaningfully presented in the crypt of text, dead and on evidentiary display). Still, Kristeva's point (like Deleuze's) is well-taken on the grounds of the image's *potentiality* to both establish and work within this "new apocalyptic rhetoric" – simply, there are some things that (as Kracauer also notes[34]) so overwhelm consciousness that they *cannot* be spoken, that *must* be shown. But this "must" also implies a critical demand: it is not only the case that the apocalypse (or the otherwise unsayable, per the short-circuiting of linguistic command) can only be re/presented via the image given the constraints of discourse, visual and otherwise, and thus "must" take this route if such an expression or re/presentation is to take place, but also and more fundamentally that this unthinkable scenario *must be brought to light*, in all its terrible and nostalgically sublime wonder, by an obsessional *compulsion.*

In many ways, this demand is easily recognized as of a part of both the melancholia arising from the neo-Baroque tropos of late capitalism and the paradoxes immanent to the relentless spectacularity and transparency of the integrated spectacle itself. In the first case, the sadistic-suicidal impulse, the saturation with and even celebration of the death drive to the point of wishing the whole world dead, I think, is obvious enough to be taken as read. In the second case, however, the demands are more antinomic, more properly apocalyptic. For on the one hand, the schizoid logic of spectacle demands both that everything be brought to the register of the image, the seen/known, while at the same time (and by this very same operation) concealing the materiality of its relations and conditions of possibility. On the other hand, and speaking to both the saturation of the integrated spectacle and the desperation of the violent melancholic gesture, the overwhelming overwhelming*ness* of the spectacle is so seemingly singular that only – in the Newtonian physos of equal and opposite reactions[35] – an equally singular force can rise above it, overpower it, drown out its noise in deafness and put out its images in absolute dark. However destructive and even nihilistically reactionary this demand may be, however much it replicates both the irrational logos of Cold-War Manicheanism and the impossibility of an end to the prevailing economy of violence to which we remain subject, it is not without logic: *the logic of the last resort.*

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[34] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 57-59; cf. Chapter Two.

Yet to the end of the potentiality to speak for us the unsayable that the image holds, the dominant expressions or visualizations of apocalypse – either the "current" apocalypse of meaning as fleetingly evidenced in apocalyptic images, or those images *of* "the" apocalypse that work to satisfy the mythic will to violence in the millennial moment – that Hollywood cinema offers quite simply do not – and cannot – cut muster. While those "chaos-images" discussed in Chapter Four begin to provide an image of an image short-circuited and overwhelmed by its immanent tensions, revealing (as do Deleuze's time-images) not only the ineffable but experienced excesses of violence and despair but also the degree to which these exceed their expression through the image, the American cinema, and in many ways now more than ever, is too firmly rooted in the domain of the Deleuzian action-image to risk such an extreme maneuver – aesthetically and philosophically – as a matter of course. Absent any clearly historiographically localized and experientially recognized crisis of experience (save, perhaps, for Vietnam, though still at the time half a world away, or the impeachment of Nixon, though relegated in thought as yet another step in the endless rotting of our Camelot) that would "push" the American cinema into those fully ambivalent, even despairing modalities of the time-image, and given those inexorable affirmative demands placed upon it by culture-industrial logic, Hollywood cinema remains for the most part arrested or retarded in its ability to aspire to philosophy (or at least those Deleuzian configurations of potentiality) at all, and as such lacks the language to deal with such crises in any way but by the logistics and affirmation of the old, mythicized ways it knows best: the indivisibility of cause and effect, negation only as a means to providential progression, and affirmative reconciliations of even the most profound and violent dispersals and alienations. In short, the inexpressible nothing must be reinvested with meaning, not as an end but as a means to an end: "we shall – and have always-already – overcome."

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[35] The adherence to this logic itself is something of a nostalgic turn, against the tide not only of the reconfiguration of the thought of physical relations – enacted first in Einsteinian relativity, to which Jameson refers as insufficient for an adequate mapping of the interaction of forces, and then later in chaos and string theory – but also of the socio-economic and epistemic conditions that, in whatever way, served as their conditions of possibility: that is, the relational fallout of capitalism's axiomatic transformations on local and global spheres. D.N. Rodowick, in his discussion of the manifestations of the Deleuzian time-image as a philosophical point of reflection and intervention into this increasingly problematic state of indiscernibility of time, space, and agency, points both to the extremity of this condition and the challenge to thought and action that accompanies it: "There is no point – fixed, intemporal, ahistorical – outside these series that enables us to make a subsumptive judgment that transcends and unifies them in a position of truth. Instead, we follow transformations in time as becomings in space, something like the mappings of phase space that are the mathematical origins of chaos theory." (*Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 101) Absent adequate means of thinking this space in the American cinematic image-regime, and given the drives to elemental and nostalgic solutions that for Kristeva and Jameson respectively mark melancholia and postmodern pastiche, this like return to an elemental and nostalgic thought of relations is unsurprising, even inevitable given the conditions at hand.

While I have already spoken (in Chapter Three) about the construction of *Armageddon*'s apocalyptic set-pieces as condensed and miniaturized narrative episodes that are the overarching narrative's tentpoles, it is useful to recall those discussions here as emblematic of Hollywood cinema's scotoma in the full thought (if not "presentation") of apocalypse. The cinematic compulsion to show and reveal the apocalypse, and even the full ability and productive potential to do so that Kristeva discusses above, is always fundamentally and schizophrenically at odds with the greater logic, internal and external, to provide or bestow order upon chaos, hope above despair, eternal presence over terminal absence. A film like *Armageddon* certainly *approaches* the apocalypse by carefully placed and motivating degree, but only approaches: however tantalizingly, only tentatively. This film, like so many other disaster/invasion narratives that for perhaps obvious reasons enjoyed a popular resurgence after the much-celebrated end of the Cold War, is little more than a doomsday clock, ticking down to that final moment where "the world" – at this moment in globalization's (a)history, crucially emblematized by the United States and its techno-militaristic front – will either prevail or disappear, and with it the world entire.[36] And even though the providential outcome is always-already predetermined, films of this ilk create a resonant space of suspense – of suspens*ion* – in anticipation of that final conflict that both inheres in this cinema's politics of charged space and is amplified vis-à-vis the millennial condensation of the generalized climate of deferral: something decisive *will* happen here, *must happen here*, and *soon* (the film, after all, must end at some point).

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[36] Though not concerned with the sort of full-scale apocalypse we are concerned with here, it should be noted that this character also colors *American Beauty* (where the "end" – Lester's death – is already and matter-of-factly foretold at the very beginning of the film, indeed before we even "meet" him, and for which we wait to see what form it will take) and *Se7en* (where the day-by-day countdown of the detectives' search for the serial killer before he completes his perversely theological mission marks a countdown to a final day of reckoning).

But while the final conflict – the apocalypse – is the ostensible "selling point" (even "money shot"), what is really promised is the inevitability that, even after so much displayed, reported, witnessed and imagined destruction, that final moment (however violently to its own bad-faith promise) will and can never come: providence will prevail, manifest destiny never moreso, and, if anything, those destructions will both open the door for a regenerative better global future and at the same time reaffirm the deific status of the paternalistic überpower that always knows best by sovereign right. *A conclusion but not a finality*: the "triumph" – even if enacted by the virtue of these surrogate figure's agency – marks little more than the resignation to a return to the same; the apocalypse, by these preemptive strikes, is deferred once again, unto infinity.

In short, "the end" is unthinkable not only because the dominant and cinematic ideologies, working in concert, prevent it, but also because it violates that imaginary of mythic law upon which both are ultimately balanced and in service. As Kristeva notes of Resnais' *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), "Hiroshima itself, and not its repercussions, is the sacrilege, the death-bearing event."[37] As in her theory of abjection, this sacrilege, for Kristeva, is in the bringing-to-consciousness of death itself, the *revelation* of death – that shameful concession to materiality and unwished-for test of mythic faith alike – to a consciousness that is defined and posed as its opposite. But at the same time, it is not the "end" that is so much unvisualizable – entire worlds, and especially in science fiction (for example, the spectacular destruction of Alderaan in *Star Wars*), are gleefully documented in their obliteration, albeit from a necessarily aestheticizing distance – but rather what it *entails*.

The fear and loathing most clearly evidenced in apocalyptic Hollywood cinema is, interestingly enough, not that of the end of the world, but rather what would happen in the absence of local and global economic order – quite simply, the message across so many of these apocalyptic texts seems to be, "without the binding force of class and capital, all hell shall be unleashed." While, as Sharrett argues, "(t)he self-immolation now confronting bourgeois society is part of the Marxist theory: Bourgeois society would rather destroy itself entirely than cross into historical-materialist consciousness, even as its own processes of representation expose its assumptions and their exhaustion,"[38] this opposite anxiety is also evident: indeed, the most pervasive anxiety of power is the leveling of the field, the chaos that cannot be lead strategically, the return of the repressed at the level of class containment and the return of the depressed in the destabilization of this order that once endowed place and privilege. The crime-ridden streets of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1984), the neo-noir underworld of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), the decrepit and impoverished ghost towns in Domenic Sena's *Kalifornia* (1993), all crawling with dirty proles with ill intent, stand as markers and warnings of the dangers of apocalypse, where no bourgeois subject is safe or sanctified, and no markers of privilege will suffice. Further, what is also evident in the representation of *post*-apocalyptic worlds (more on which presently) is the terror and despair that arises in the absence of another ordering force: the cinema itself. It is not coincidental that the cinema is notably absent from post-apocalyptic landscapes; even if visual media survive in full force (as in *Blade Runner*'s omnipresent televisual walls), the cinema is never explicitly among them: a world in ruins is a world without movies, or more to the point, a world without movies is inevitably a world in ruin – and the movies implicitly compel us to appreciate this. Gilliam's post-to-pre-apocalyptic time travel fantasia *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) teaches (or rather forces) this lesson well: as Cole (Bruce Willis) and Karen (Madeleine Stowe) sit in the movie house at the beginning of the film's final act, he weeps – not simply because he knows time is running out for the redemption of the present and future world, but because a failure to decisively change the course of history will also entail a return to his artless, filmless future.

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[37] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 231.

[38] Sharrett, "Sacrificial Violence and Postmodern Ideology," 423.

What Kristeva's claim that the cinema is (and remains) "the supreme art of the apocalypse" entails, for our time and this context, is thus in need of measured qualification. The very notion of an *image of* apocalypse – if one takes this last in its full nihilistic seriousness as a singular, wholesale negation of "the world as we know it" and the emergence of a world beyond comprehension – is difficult to conceptualize, even given the obsessive articulation of apocalypses throughout the recent history of this cinema.[39] On the one hand, the multiple renderings of the apocalypse or its possibility work to cover all bases of the potential of humankind's hubris to undo the world: atomic bombs, financial collapse, environmental destruction, civil insurrection, murderous sentient machines, hostile alien forces, disruptions in the order of the cosmos itself – no potential source or mode of annihilation has been left uncovered or unaestheticized, no desire to witness such events has been left unaccommodated or unexploited. On the other hand, however, there can be no *fully* realized image of apocalypse in Hollywood cinema: one would think that this actualization would "kill the film dead," so to speak, negating its visions and its compulsory mythic appeals. Close *approximations* of such an effect clearly abound in contemporary cinema, the most notable perhaps being the mushroom-cloud montage that closes Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), though even here the ironic liltings of Vera Lynn's rendition of Parker and Charles' "We'll Meet Again" work to defuse and diffuse the spectacle's more terrifying qualities (indeed, it re/turns the apocalyptic images *to* spectacle). Even Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* turns back against the end it promises in its very title: the film, which was originally to end on a several-minute montage consisting of sustained shots of a napalm inferno reducing the Kurtz compound to ash, before release omitted this "doomsday sequence" in favor of closing the film with the more localized and mythic confrontation between Willard (Martin Sheen) and Kurtz (Marlon Brando); consequently and all-too-characteristically, the film ends in an affirmation of the mythos of sacrifice and the return to primitivist origins that Bataille and Slotkin account for so well, rather than in negation, fire, and dark.

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[39] It should be noted, however briefly and broadly, that the millennial obsession with the apocalyptic is articulated somewhat differently than in previous decades. Through the 1970's, the dominant modes of envisioning and articulating apocalypse were either concatenated around the microcosms of post-human subjects (from *Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle to *The Conversation*'s Harry Caul) or in techno-paranoiac disaster fantasies of spectacular technological failure (*Airport*, *The Poseidon Adventure*, *The China Syndrome*) and, overall, took the limited and contained forms of localized (though metonymic) disaster rather than Armageddon *tout court*. Throughout the Reagan-era Cold War, the dominant expression of apocalypse found a more singular locus: in the appropriately nostalgicized and conservative conception of the externality and otherness of the

And tellingly enough, even within the charged context of the millennial moment, little has changed. David Fincher, a director nonpareil in his obsession with nihilism, entropy and melancholia, has concluded all of his films to date with suicidal or apocalyptic gestures: *Alien³* (1992) concludes with Lt. Ripley's (Sigourney Weaver) suicide and a computer monitor shorting out to black; *Se7en* (1995) sputters and dies after the psychical self-annihilation of its protagonist; *The Game* (1997) closes with a free-fall to a promised death; *Fight Club* closes not only with an attempt of suicide, but an image of the world crashing

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Evil Empire, exerting its will to power upon our borders (*Red Dawn, Rambo, Predator*, etc.). In the millennial moment, however, there is something of a return to the crisis of thought (if not affect) of that inaugural moment of late capitalism, but absent the political consciousness and thought of potential that so clearly marked it; instead, resignation, ennui, and cynical narcissism are the orders of the day.

down, at which point the film itself stutters, runs off its track and goes black; and perhaps cutting closest to the heart of things, *Panic Room* (2002) culminates in both the surrender to death by police bullets and the destruction of the plot's motivating force: millions in hoarded bearer bonds, released into a rainstorm's cyclonic updraft, return to circulation, ascend into the sky, and dematerialize. But even in these notable gestures, and even though what these images cast upon the screen reveals both the pervasive melancholia of the eternal now and the only perceived (albeit simulacral) means to escape it, the films, like the cinema that produced them, always "right themselves." *Alien³* couldn't kill the franchise, its apocalypse held for only a brief time (until contracts could be attractively renegotiated); studio demands likewise "righted" *Se7en* and *The Game*: both were altered in such a way that their apocalyptic moments never fully came to be, and were reconciled in affirmative terms (a reassuring if still melancholic voice-over[40] in the former, and a shaggy-dog punchline – "It's OK, it's all part of the game!" – in the latter); and *Panic Room* closes on a sunny spring day, mother and daughter secure in each other's company, househunting once again.

Fight Club's concluding apocalyptic gesture is perhaps most problematic of all, its final frames juxtaposing the basest nihilism with a pronounced image of nostalgia, concluding on a note both apocalyptic and utopian at the same time. Here, the Narrator (having already literally slain his "darker half" through an attempted suicide, as discussed above), taking Marla's hand as they watch the financial institutions around them explode and crumble into dust, utters simply, "You met me at a very strange time in my life," directly implying, in this moment, an exorcized past and a blossoming future. The film, then, ends on an ironically "progressive" and forward-looking note, the past left behind in the violent deposing of a false god and the promise of its replacement with something at one and the same time more regressively traditional and ineffably spiritual: *love.* Through the unthinkable destruction of the centers of capital, through forcing the hand of fiscal apocalypse, the film posits a progression in the regression to a state unencumbered by the demands of late capitalism and comfortably based on – of all things! – the romanticized, traditional heterosexual union: the slate wiped clean, Adam and Eve stand cleansed and without sin before the new garden. But this Eden is a post-apocalyptic wasteland, a *tableaux mordant* of new ruins, the Baroque cult reborn in the apocalyptic destruction of material excess and the return to "simpler" relations.

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[40] Immediately before the credits roll, Detective Somerset (Morgan Freeman) says in a plaintive voice-over: "Ernest Hemmingway once said that the world is a wonderful place, and worth fighting for…I believe in the second part." While the diegetic figuration of melancholic protagonists has been of primary concern here, a note should be made also of the preponderance of voice-over narration that accompanies them, either as interior monologues or expositional maneuvers. As part of these protagonist's already overdetermined melancholia, it seems, the voice-over – the voice at once internal and external to the subject – is crucial: thought and speech are disconnected from deed and ends, solipsistic passages that explain a great deal but effect nothing. Further, those narrations that either introduce or close an apocalyptic narrative are reassuring in their mere presence: even after the end, there is still a voice that speaks, that can encapsulate, synthesize, and regeneratively restore meaning, that lives on, however apart from the world.

This, in its own way, is precisely the utopian impulse which Baudrillard and Sharrett proclaim as fundamentally empty, a bitterly ironized mirror to Lyotard's similarly utopian-nihilist invocation, "we have to re-set the hands of the clock at zero,"[41] in attempting a normalization through destruction, regenerating through negating violence. The pre-credit stutter and flame-out, moreover, is at once the most decisive expression of the film's own nihilism and a final wink; in this overt reminder of the materiality and presence of the apparatus, the message is clear: "it's only a movie, folks; time to go home." This "ending," then, brings into clear focus the status and potentials of apocalyptic Hollywood cinema itself in the millennial moment, providing divergent and irreconcilable "solutions" to the problem of melancholic subjectivity within the totality of late capitalism, where all promises – be they apocalyptic, utopian or both at once – are ultimately as empty as they are spectacular.

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[41] Lyotard, "Defining the Postmodern," 171.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

The soul of the cinema demands increasing thought, even if thought begins by undoing the system of actions, perceptions, and affectations on which the cinema had fed up to that point. We hardly believe any longer that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it – no more than we believe that an action can force a situation to disclose itself, even partially. The most 'healthy' illusions fall.[42]

Gilles Deleuze
Cinema I: The Movement-Image

What cannot be directly spoken is also what is occluded from sight, absent from the visual field that organized melancholia. Melancholia is kept from view; it is an absorption by something that cannot be accommodated by vision, that resists being brought into the open, neither seen nor declared.[43]

Judith Butler
"Melancholy, Ambivalence, Rage"

The dogged inability for the cinema to fully envision "the apocalypse" and the drive to avoid this possibility is perhaps revealed most directly in the persistent presentation of the apocalyptic landscape "after the fact": the post-apocalyptic film, entering the scene too late to show anything but the future effects of the wholesale destruction. Consider, for example, the epigraphal passages of James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) and Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001). The concerted generality of their descriptions is striking, the active displacement of the end to an inaccessible time and place that can be neither fully remembered nor adequately represented. In Cameron's film, over ruined city strewn with skulls, identified as "Los Angeles: 2029 A.D.," a bird of war swoops into frame firing laser blasts at unseen human targets, a pile of skulls explodes in close-up and, in the next shot, a tank rolls over more (even in apocalypse, the remainder must be destroyed: dust to dust). In the next shot, the following stark white text appears over yet another arrangement of skulls, which fade to black as the text remains:

> *The machines rose from the ashes of the nuclear fire.*
> *Their war to exterminate mankind had raged for decades,*
> *but the final battle would not be fought in the future.*
> *It would be fought here, in our present.*
>
> *Tonight…*

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[42] Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 206.
[43] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 186.

While this descriptive account firmly places the burden of responsibility for this horrifying anti-earth on inhuman machines (as immediately recognizable loci of violence) and at least anti-human practices ("their war," which apropos of a Cold-War logos passively rages without their specifically waging it), the temporal shifts both in the text and indicated by its form and presence are particularly notable: over the image of the future, a message from and for the present, the text bestowing meaning that endures beyond the image, but the image knows, reveals, the terrible fate in store, even though it cannot reveal the process or event. The present image (the image presented) is an image of the future, which fades into the past (our present, "tonight," *as judgment night*) without the apocalyptic event ever being represented, fixed or fixable: it is purely, properly, authorless and apocryphal, out(side) of historical causation and significance, of time itself.

The post-title sequence of Spielberg's film similarly speaks to the necessary displacement of the event, but this time to an unrepresentable, inaccessible and indefinable *past.* Over the sight and sound of violently crashing waves, a stately and reassuringly dispassionate British voice (marginally recognizable as Ben Kingsley) intones:

> *Those were the years after the icecaps had melted because of the greenhouse gases, and the oceans had risen to drown so many cities along all the shorelines of the world: Amsterdam, Venice, New York, forever lost. Millions of people were displaced, climates became chaotic, hundreds of millions of people starved in poorer countries; elsewhere a high degree of prosperity survived when most governments in the developed world introduced legal sanctions to strictly license pregnancies; which is why robots, who are never hungry and never consume resources beyond those of their first manufacture, were so essential and economically in the chain mail of society.*

In both cases, what is most striking about these displacements of the event into the spatiotemporal ether is their concerted use of the passive voice: the greenhouse gases that melted the icecaps were culpable for that tragedy, not the processes that created them; the war of the machines against their human creators retains nothing of the hubris of the creation of artificial intelligence applied to instruments of war, and so forth. In each case, between the temporal displacements, apocryphal descriptions, and passive inflections, the human element of culpability for these apocalyptic scenarios and of the means to correct them is concertedly absented: out of sight and out of all hands, thoughts, and deeds.

This impulse is not limited, however, to those sci-fi meditations on the post-human world (allegories themselves, it is clear enough, of the post-modern world). An increasingly pervasive trope in late-20th century film and media is precisely that of "arriving too late": the detective or passerby, for example, who stumbles across the corpse and must, crucially, reconstruct that lost witnessing of the act to rid the haunting of the unsolved and authorless act. This obsession with "postmortem violence,"[44] as Laurent Bouzereau has called it, a profound violence to which we have had no access or ability to circumvent but with effects that we must contend, is yet another marker of the paralysis of the eternal now and, interestingly enough, the means by which this cinema perhaps most fully finds an expression and recognition of the weight of the millennial condition.

What these themes, tropes, and strategies suggest is not only the unthinkability (if not unrepresentability) of the end in and of itself, but also a final insight into the melancholia that marks this time and the properly "revelatory" function of apocalyptic cinema that Kristeva describes: here, it is particularly clear that "(w)e are survivors, living dead, corpses on furlough, sheltering personal Hiroshimas in the bosom of our private worlds."[45] At the level of the image of the subject and of meaning itself, the apocalypse happened long ago, in the slow blooming of spectacular society, not in the spectacular flash of some semiological atom bomb. The millennial subject, like the detectives, daysleepers, and amnesiacs who wander in search of clues to meaning and whose fate always entails the will to – and *of* – violence, has arrived on the scene too late to act, and the antidote to this paralysis is hauntingly, tantalizingly out of reach, out of sight, out of frame.

These are perhaps the truest figures of millennial melancholia, reflections of a condition as ineffable and inescapable in clinical terms as in current, lived reality: drifting through a world of violence without stops or end, piecing together evidence that will never add up, because life and all the violence which so deeply structures it, so very much unlike the movies, isn't completed in the bang of revelation but with an unanswered, plaintive whimper: "*Now, where was I?*"

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[44] Bouzereau, *Ultraviolent Movies*, 233.

[45] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 236.

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